

GRACE TRIUMPHANT

A SERIES OF SERMONS

BY

CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON

With a Photogravure Portrait of the Author

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Preface

THIS volume contains a series of sermons by the late Charles Haddon Spurgeon, which have never before appeared in print. They are characteristic of the great preacher in that department of his work which he loved so much, and in which he exhibited such supreme gifts—the direct appeal to the heart and conscience of his hearers, the close application of Scripture promise, teaching and rebuke to the habits and practices of their daily life.

These sermons will bring back to those who heard him often in the past the very tones of his magnificent voice, and the persuasive attitudes of the prince of preachers as he pleaded with men on behalf of his Master.

And many readers will doubtless be glad to possess the fine photogravure portrait which forms the frontispiece of the book.

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I

The Novelties of Divine Mercy

"His compassions . . . are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness."—LAMENTATIONS iii. 22, 23.

THE Book of the Lamentations of Jeremiah is very dolorous. When you look upon the dragons, and owls, the pelicans, and bitterns in the wilderness, you have a fit picture of his mournful state. He was full of grief, like a bottle wanting vent. His heart was ready to burst with wormwood and with gall.

But the whole current changes when the prophet brings to his remembrance the mercy of God. No sooner does he think of the compassion of the Most High than at once he takes his harp from the willows and begins to sing as sweetly as ever that sweet singer of Israel, David, sang before him. Truly, if we, too, instead of harping upon our troubles, would but reflect upon our mercies, we should exchange our mournful ditties for songs of joy.

It is true that God's people are a tried people; it is equally true that their grace is equal

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to their trials. Through much tribulation they enter the kingdom, but then they *do* enter, and the thought of the kingdom that is coming sustains them in their present tribulation. They wade through the waters of woe, often breast deep, but then the billows do not, and shall not, go over them; they shall still be able to sing even in the midst of the tempest. I would suggest to any here who are in the habit of complaining—a very bad habit—any who have become chronic murmurers—that this temper of mind is sinful, while, on the other hand, the remembrance of God's mercy, and grateful talk about it, is a virtuous habit, one which is honourable to God, as well as strengthening and profitable to our own souls. Imitate Jeremiah, then, and if you can find no comfort in your present outward circumstances, meditate upon the unfailing mercies of God.

What a blessed word that is which the prophet here uses—'compassions!' David uses the word 'pity' more frequently, but he means the same thing. It is a humbling word, though exceedingly consolatory. I have often felt very deeply chastened in my own soul at that text 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.' What! is this the Lord's attitude to the strongest and the best of saints? Does God only pity them? Yes, it is even so. Those that do exploits, those that lead the van in the day of battle, those to whom we look up to with respect and admiration, God looks

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upon with infinite love, but that love still takes the form of pity. He can see their weakness where we see their strength; He can discover their defects where we admire the work of the Holy Spirit in them, and He regards them with pity. Yet it is a father's pity, a father who smiles at the weakness of the child, knowing that the attempt which it is making, though a feeble one, will educate it for something better; foreseeing that it will by-and-by outgrow its weakness, and be able to do greater things.

God has compassion for the best of His people, but it is compassion prompted by love. It is not the pity that is akin to scorn, but the pity which melts from love, as the honey drops from the honeycomb. I would again ask our dear friends who are tried and troubled, to think of the infinite pity of God towards them. He has smitten you, but still not as hard as He might have done; out of pity He has stayed His hand. He has spoken sharply in your conscience, but if He had spoken as loudly there as your sins deserved there would have been thunder-claps instead of admonitions.

He has withered your gourds, but if He had done what justice might have demanded it would not have been the gourd that withered, but you, yourself, would have withered away. Admire the compassion of God! If one child in your family is sick, they are not all sick; if He has taken away one friend by death, there are friends still left; you have had heavy losses, but you are not a bankrupt;

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you are not in good health, but still you have not been stricken with the diseases which have attacked some others ; your pain is bearable. It is true the weather is dull and heavy to your spirit, but it is not quite the blackness of the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Take heart even in the midst of smitings, for the compassion of God is still to be seen.

Moved by such thoughts as these, the prophet penned the remarkable words before us :—' His compassions are new every morning ; great is Thy faithfulness.'

I have been admiring the first part of the sentence which suggests to me the novelties of divine mercy, and as I speak of it I mean to get you to preach to yourselves, to wake up your recollections, to ask you to turn over a few pages in your old pocket-books, to make you look at your diaries, and remember what God has done for you since you knew His name.

I. GOD'S MERCIES ARE ALWAYS NOVELTIES.

They are new every morning. The water that is in the cistern may be sufficient for a long time, but if it is stored it will not be fresh. It might have been fresh the first morning that I drew it, but it will not be fresh on the morrow, and the longer it lasts the more stagnant will it become. But the water from the spring-head is always new. I drank of it when a boy ; I go to it in the prime of manhood ; I stoop to drink of it when my hair turns grey, and still it is new and sparkling. God is not the cistern, but the

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fountain. Our treasures which we lay up on earth are the stagnant pools, but the treasure which God gives us from heaven, in providence and in grace, is the crystal fount which wells up from the eternal deeps, and is always fresh and always new. There are no grey hairs upon the Angel of Mercy; no wrinkles upon His brow. I may say of Him what the sweet writer of Solomon's Song says of the spouse:—'His locks are bushy and black as a raven.' Mercy is of old, and is for ever God's darling attribute, yet it is always bright, and fair, and clear, and young. Mercy is not a tree that yields but once in the year its fruit, which may be stored through the depths of winter, and preserved till, perhaps, it shall have become rotten; Mercy is the tree of life, which beareth its fruit every month. At all times and at all seasons we may share the compassion of God and we shall find that it is new every morning.

The thought that God's mercy is always new is a pleasing one, but that it is new every morning is very wonderful. If you had to preach you would find it no small difficulty to have something new every Sunday, but God has something new for us every morning. I suppose the writers in our newspapers often have to vex and agitate their brains to get us something new, but God, with the greatest of ease, sends to the millions of His people something new every morning. He does not need to repeat Himself. If He sends the same mercy, yet there is a something about it which shows it to be

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fresh. God never gives us old money that has been worn, His mercy always comes fresh from the mint with all the gloss and all the brightness of new coinage. His compassions are new every morning, not some mornings, but every morning, from the first of January to the last of December. God never has to stay His hand. He never has to pause to think of something fresh, but His mercies come to us freely, spontaneously—new every morning. Let us think a little of it.

In the first place, every morning brings a new mercy, because *every morning ends the night*. The night is the hour of danger and dismay. Why do we ask concerning the sick, 'How did he pass the night?' We do not enquire, 'How did he pass the day?' Is it not because, somehow or other, we have connected the night with the idea of insecurity and danger? We wear the image of death when we sleep, and how slight the difference is between a sleeping man and a dead man is plain to all beholders. Every morning we may say, 'what a mercy that our bed did not become our tomb! What a mercy that, in the night, we were not alarmed with fire, that our couch was not consumed, and ourselves in it; that the house was not broken into by wicked men; that no convulsions of nature terrified us; that no cry of anguish, like the shrieks that woke up every parent in Egypt, was heard in our house because our child was dying!' Such cries have been heard by some of us, and we have had dreadful nights which we never shall forget, let us

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live as long as we may ; but every morning in which we wake, with such terrors past, or after that sweet, quiet night in which God gives to His beloved sleep, we have had a new mercy, and we may at once look to the text and say, ' Because another night is gone ; Thy mercies are new every morning.'

But every morning also brings a new mercy, because *every morning ushers in another day*. That is a new call to praise, for we have no right to an hour, much less to a day.

To the sinner, especially, it is a great mercy to have another day of grace, another opportunity for repentance, a little more space in which to ' escape from hell and fly to heaven,' a new reprieve from death. Ah! soul, supposing thou hadst never seen the light of another rising sun, but hadst heard instead thereof the dreadful sentence, ' Depart, cursed one, into the darkness which shall never be pierced by a ray of light!' What a mercy that thou art spared!

The Christian may thank God that he has another day in which he may walk with God at Enoch's pace ; another day in which he may trust God at Abraham's rate ; another day in which he may work for Christ, as Paul did ; another day in which he may reap the Gospel harvest ; another day in which he may gather pearls for Immanuel's crown ; another day in which he may ripen for glory ; another day in which he may hold communion with the Lord ; another day in which he may be making advances in the divine pilgrimage towards the

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Celestial City. God gives us our days; may He teach us their value, for they are priceless pearls, and when the morning breaks we may truly say, 'Thy mercies are fresh every morning, for the morning has brought us another day.'

Further, a new mercy comes, at least to the most of us, because *each morning brings supplies for the day*. I have often thought to myself, 'what a mercy to know that when I wake there is a breakfast for me!' There are many, alas, who do not know where the first meal in the day may come from. That is a sorrowful thing, and a very heavy discipline, but it is certainly not the case with the most of us. There is enough in the cupboard for the next day. When we rise in the morning we are not quite like the sparrows, who have to seek their food; they sing, you know, as soon as they wake; there is nothing in their barn, but they sing, as Luther heard them:—

'Mortal, cease from care and sorrow;
God provideth for the morrow!'

Then they set to work to find their daily bread, and find it they do, for God feeds the fowls of heaven. Now, your day's provision is waiting for you. There is the manna outside the camp for you, and you know where to gather it. As you bless the name of the Lord remember His mercy.

But you have not all you could wish, you say, and so are not happy. Ah! remember the Apostle's words, 'Having food and raiment, let us be there—

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with content,' and learn the Apostle's lesson, 'I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound : everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.'

Again, let me remind you, because I am afraid some of you—especially those who have abundance, do not remember it enough, that daily you are dependent upon God's providence; that you as much receive your daily bread from God as if the ravens brought it; that you as certainly obtain all that you receive from the hand of God as if it dropped from the clouds, or as if the winds brought you quails. Be thankful, then, that as each day brings its want in the household for daily bread, and clothing, and covering, God is pleased to give also His mercies every morning.

In spiritual things, my brethren in Christ, how richly may the text be illustrated. His compassions are new every morning because *every morning I commit new sins*. Strange creature that I am, I can scarce open my eyes to the light, but my soul begins to display its darkness! Miserable humanity that I am by nature, I can scarcely breathe without offending in the thoughts and imaginations of my heart, and even though I may watch my eyes, and guard my tongue, and keep the members of my body pure, yet still the heart goeth a-wandering, and the tongue ere long speaketh idle words! Well, but then there always comes the new pardon. Thy

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compassions are new every morning, and so we leave our chamber and go to the

‘fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins,’

and we wash once again and are clean. When we go to business, and tug and toil, we are prone to wander from God; yet we may still think of our Master, who girded Himself with a towel, took a basin, and did wash His disciples’ feet, and then said that they were clean every whit. For our daily pollutions need a daily cleansing. We have been once washed in the blood, and so are clean before God, but we need to be daily purged from our hourly defilements, and every morning brings us this grace.

Then, my brethren, we scarcely leave our chamber, nay, we have not left it, before *the morning brings new temptations*. Some mornings especially bring us temptations that we have never experienced before; insinuations gain entrance into our own mind which never did perplex us till that moment. We scarcely know what to do with them, and young Christians, especially, are staggered when these diabolical shafts are winged toward them. Then when we get down from our chamber, who knows when he begins the day how long he shall be before he shall be sorely tempted to sin. Ah! if we did but know at what hour the thief would come we might watch, but lo! Satan and sin come like a thief in the night.

The time when the child of God is most likely to

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sin is when he is in the holiest frame of mind. You may think that an odd remark, but I make it from experience. I have often found when I have been nearest to God in prayer, or when I have most enjoyed a service, that I have then been met by somebody who said something cross, or wicked, or unkind, and I have been tempted to answer, and perhaps have answered, as I have afterwards been sorry to have answered. Because, after having your mind lifted up you are not prepared exactly for these contrary ones. Just in your moments of highest joy something may trip your foot. Well, now, it is such a mercy to think that when I begin the morning, though I cannot know what temptations may come, I can know that God's mercies are new every morning, and therefore that there will be fresh grace to bear me through the fresh temptation. We shall be taken with no temptation but such as is common to man, and God will, with the temptation, also make a way of escape. Put on the Gospel armour, and then, let its shafts fall where they may, they shall not wound, or if a wound be received between the joints of the harness, there is a tree whose leaves are for the healing of the nations, and a heavenly hand shall reach down these healing leaves that the wounds may be staunched. Let us be glad, then, that there is daily grace for daily conflict.

And, my brethren, we do not completely know when we wake what will be the particular tasks of the day: *each morning brings new duties*. Even

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though we should know completely, as we know in part, the service appointed for the day, yet it would be a sad thing to wake up to new responsibilities and new duties if we had not also new strength. Every day brings a new duty, or it may be an old duty in another shape and cast in another mould. All that I did yesterday cannot exonerate me if I am idle to-day, and all the service that I did for my Master a year ago will be no excuse if I waste this year. I must take each hour of time on the wing, and I must seek to get wealth from it as it passes by me. Beloved, there shall be daily strength given to you for the daily duty to which God calls you. Depend upon it if God will have us work for Him He will not have us go a warfare at our own charges, but He will provide His soldiers with weapons, and provide the worker in the vineyard with tools. There is daily grace, then, for new duties.

I might go on to mention that each day will bring its trials, that each day will bring its anxieties and necessities, but each morning brings us the promise, 'As thy *days*'—note that text is in the plural, and not as so many quote it, 'As thy *day*,' but 'As thy *days* so shall thy strength be.' As long as days shall last, till days shall all be swallowed up in time, and time shall be swallowed up in eternity, God's compassions shall be new every morning, to meet our new needs, our new relations, our new responsibilities, our new temptations, and our new sins.

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But we will try to illustrate this subject in another light, for this text is very like a kaleidoscope ; you may turn it as many times as you will, and there is constantly a fresh form of beauty to be seen. Remember therefore that—

II. SOMETIMES THE MERCIES WE RECEIVE ARE ACTUALLY NEW IN THEMSELVES.

You have all had events in life when a new mercy has been bestowed upon you. Just think—I shall not mention them—but just think of the Ebenezers all along your pathway, and of the stones of Bethel that you have piled after some distinguishing favour which has made the day memorable. Such mercies as these have been particularly new. Sometimes the mercy is *new in substance*; you have received what you never received before.

At other times the mercy is not so much new in substance as it is *new in the way of coming*. I am sure that yesterday, when, after praying for the last two or three months that God would remember the various works we have in hand, we received a thousand pounds for the Stockwell Orphanage from some unknown donor, I felt that it was a new mercy. Money has been sent for the work at different times, but it has always been sent in a different way or a different form each time, and each time it has well-nigh overwhelmed me. When I heard of that yesterday, I was sitting with a dear brother who had just been saying to me, ‘My dear friend, there are some people who say, “Our brother Spurgeon does not know where to stop; he is always going on

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from one good thing to another ; if he should make a failure it would be a very dreadful thing." Now,' he said, 'don't you think it would be a great catastrophe? What a great deal of money is required for the College'—and he mentioned other things. 'Suppose there should be a failure in the income!' I said, 'I never suppose any such thing ; I have no purpose to serve, and no end to gain, and no motive but God's glory ; I was forced into these works against my will, and God cannot leave me ; He must carry on the work, and I am persuaded that He will ; my motto is Jehovah Jireh.'

At that moment the post came, and the letter was opened which contained the £1,000. Our friend just said, 'My dear brother, let us kneel down and pray,' and so we did, and with many tears thanked God, oh! in such a warm-hearted manner. I then felt how foolish we were to talk about things failing that are undertaken for God, because God is sure to help us. My friend said it was a blessed means of grace to him, and that he should recollect that day as one of the choice days in his life, in which God had showed that He would help those who in His name undertake work for the poor and needy, and try to aid His cause. Well, now, was not that new? It was not a new thing for us to receive help, but it came in a new way, and thus God's mercies are new every morning.

Then, sometimes, when you do not get the mercy exactly in a new way, yet *it seems new to you because you are in a new condition.* You have more know-

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ledge, and can comprehend the value of the mercy more. You have more experience, and can understand your own need of that mercy better. The mercy which comes to a young man of twenty has a brightness about it; the mercy which comes to that man at seventy may not have so much sparkle, but there will be, I think, if the man is a grown Christian—and age is not always identical with growth in grace—a deeper and more solemn sense of obligation. As we grow in life the glitter of our thoughts may depart, but the solid gold of them will increase and multiply; that is to say, if we do really grow mature in spirit as well as old in years. The Lord grant that we may! I am sure that the light in which the aged man regards a mercy is a different light, in some respects, from that in which the young man regards it. The babe in grace is very grateful, and sees that the mercy is precious, but the man in Christ Jesus has a gratitude of a richer kind. The mercy is new because we see it in a new light, and it finds us in another state.

But I will come at once to the practical point.

III. ARE GOD'S MERCIES NEW EVERY MORNING? WHAT THEN?

Then I call upon you for new praise. I ask, in the name of Jesus Christ, whose new mercy, my brethren and sisters, you and I are always receiving, that our hearts should praise Him hour by hour. Weave new crowns for Christ! Sing new sonnets in honour of His blessed person, and of the mercy which flows to us from Him.

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Nay, I ask not merely for wordy praise, but for *actions*, which shall speak louder than *new* words. Be not content with what you have done ; still out of gratitude be doing something new, if possible. As the soldier in conflict marches forward let us do something more advanced. Let us be even as the eagle mounts when he soars to the skies, circling higher and higher ; as the wind, when it is gathering in its strength, blowing stronger and stronger. God grant that we may not rest on our laurels, saying, ' We did this when we were young, or gave that yesterday,' but still as the new mercy comes let there be on our part new returns of service.

And I ask, not only for these new actions, but for *new faith*. Let every mercy confirm our confidence in the God of mercy. All these compassions of our covenant God are but so many swift witnesses against our unbelief. All these lovingkindnesses are earnest evidences for the confirmation of our confidence in God. ' At what time ' may God say to us, ' At what time have I been false to you ? Have I been a wilderness unto Israel ? Have I received you for a season, and then cast you away ? Have I been slack in blessing you ? Have I stinted you in mercy ? Have I withheld my lovingkindness ? ' You dare not say that God has been illiberal towards you. His mercies have been new every morning. Shall God then have to say to you, ' Thou hast bought Me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled Me with the fat of thy sacrifices, but thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins, and thou hast

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wearied Me with thine iniquities'? Oh! let Him not need thus to upbraid us, but let our reasoning be, 'What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards me?' and so let us give Him new praise, new gratitude, and new acts of gratitude.

I ask then for new confidence in God, or, if you cannot mount so high as this, at any rate I ask from all here who have known the faithfulness of God that they would offer Him *new prayers*. If you have been heard already, pray again. The beggar in the street says, 'Help me this time, and I'll never ask again.' Oh! say not that, thou who beggest at mercy's door, but

'From His mercy draw a plea,
And ask Him still for more.'

'Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it,' is the promise. Shake thy wings, and go to God, and expect that He will still exceed thy faith and do for thee exceeding abundantly above all that thou dost ask or even think.

Gathering up much into little, I ask of all Christians the exercise of a holy ingenuity in the inventing of *new plans* for the honour of Christ. I ask the exercise of a holy perseverance in carrying out those plans into action. I ask every morning for the blazing of a holy zeal, to make the carrying out of these plans to be always fervent and always earnest, that, as His lovingkindnesses are new every morning, so also may our grateful recollections be.

I have no time left to enter into the second

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sentence, though I had intended to do so, 'Great is Thy faithfulness.' I shall, therefore, only utter these few sentences.

IV. 'GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS.'

So great that *there has never been an exception to it*. Thou hast never at any time acted towards any one of Thy people otherwise than according to truth and righteousness. It is a marvellous thing : a man may be very honest, and very upright, and yet if he conducts an extensive business it will be very difficult for him to escape from a charge, sometimes, of having overstepped the mark. He may never have done so, but still it will be very difficult, especially if he has many servants, to escape the charge of such a thing. But our God has had millions of people to deal with, throughout all ages, and yet there stands not beneath the copes of heaven, nor even above the stars, a single soul that can say that God in any transaction has ever dealt with him otherwise than according to faithfulness.

But, further than that. *No item in the whole roll of Divine promises has been omitted by God towards us*. Old Joshua said, 'Not one thing hath failed of all the good things the Lord your God spake concerning you.' If a man shall make many promises I will defy him to keep them all, because even if he be able to keep them, yet still he will not always be able to recollect them. But God remembers every promise that He ever made, and He takes care to honour each of those promises in the experience of those who believe in Him. They

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who trust in Him shall find God to be good not only in great things, but also in little things ; while He keeps the oath of His covenant fast for ever, His faintest word shall abide, and the least truth which He has ever declared shall never grow dim. He is a tree, the leaf whereof shall not wither ; He bringeth forth His fruit in His season.

The glory of all God's faithfulness is that *no sin of man has ever made Him unfaithful*. Unbelief is a most damning thing, and yet, though we believe not, He abideth faithful. His children may kick against His law, and they may wander far from His statutes, and He may visit them with stripes, and yet saith He, ' My lovingkindness will I not utterly take away from him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail.' God's saints may fall under the cloud, and provoke the Most High, yet He will have compassion upon them, and turn unto them and say, ' I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.' No sin of man can make Him unfaithful.

And, once again, *no exigence that can by possibility arise can ever compel God to be unfaithful to His people*. If the whole world shall go to wreck and ruin, yet He will bear up the pillars of His peoples' hope. When His saints cannot be safe under heaven He will take them up to heaven. When He shall bid the tongues of fire rise up to consume this world, and the elements shall dissolve with fervent heat, if we are alive and remain at the

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coming of the Son of Man, we shall be caught up together with the Lord in the air. God always provides an ark for Noah before He sends the deluge ; He always has a mountain ready for Lot before He destroys Sodom. If His David must be driven from the court, he shall be housed in Engedi, and if, by-and-by, the Philistines shall come against the land, yet still He shall take care to raise up His servant who shall deliver His people from the enemy. At the pinch God will be there. You may count and reckon that He has not forgotten ; that when the clock strikes and the bell tolls the hour God will arise for the defence of His people, and show Himself strong on the behalf of all them that trust in Him.

Settle it in your minds, beloved, that He cannot lie. Believe every man to be a liar if you will, but never believe that God can fail you. If thou speakest in thy soul after this fashion : ‘ Sometimes I see the wicked prosper, and I am in tribulation and distress ; and my spirit saith, “ Hath God forgotten ? Will He give all the good things to those who curse Him, and cause His people to be chastened evermore ? ” ’ Speak thou that in thy soul softly, and then add, ‘ Yet though all things thus seem, I know that God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart, and though He slay me yet I will trust in Him ; the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord ; it is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good ; in quietness and patience shall be thy

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strength ; trust in the Lord and do good ; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.' Cast not away your confidence which hath great recompense of reward. Hold to that faith as the Grecian warrior held to his shield. Therein lies your safety. God help you still clinging to Him. When you cannot rejoice in the light of His countenance, trust in the shadow of His wings, and even there, like David, you may learn to rejoice.

I leave the subject with you for your future meditations, and pray God to quicken in every one of His people a life of holy joy and confidence.

Oh! that some of you who listen to these words knew anything at all of the experiences of God's people! You that live the life of sense and have no faith in God, little know what I mean, for though I have talked largely of the sorrows of God's people, yet the joys of faith are unspeakable. One drop of God's love would sweeten a sea of gall. Ay, I was almost about to say that even the pangs of hell would lose their bitterness if a drop of the love of Christ could once flow there, and be tasted by those who are lost. Christian, you know already what it is to find roses among the thorns, and to find your pangs and your sufferings to be soul-enriching things, messengers from the King which bring you unto His banquet of wine, and lead you to the discovery of the treasures hidden in the sand. You know this. Tell it to the ungodly; and mayhap their mouths will be set a-watering after the good things of Christ's table. When they once

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long for them they shall have them, for Christ never refuses a hungry one. And if there be such an one here, a poor, empty, destitute soul, remember, mercy's door stands always open, and Christ, the Host of the Gospel Inn, stands always ready to receive every soul that comes, having written this over the door of the Inn, 'Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out!'

II

The Tenderness of God's Comfort

'As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem.'—ISAIAH lxvi. 13.

WE do not intend entering into a discussion of the context and its relationship literally to the Jewish people. We have never hesitated to assert our conviction that there are great blessings in store for God's ancient Israel, and that the day shall come when her comfort shall abound, when the glory of the Gentiles shall flow to her like a flowing stream, and she shall be comforted by her God as one whom his mother comforteth. But we believe that these passages are applicable to all the servants of God; that the comfortable passages of scripture are theirs; that whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free, barbarian or Greek, we are all one in Christ Jesus; and all the promises are ours in Him, for in Him all the promises are 'yea' and 'amen.' I believe, then, that this passage belongs to every child of God.

It is well that there is such a promise as this on record, for believers need comfort. They need

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comfort because they are men, and 'man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.' There has been a great necessity for consolation ever since the time man was expelled from Eden; they need comfort because they are but men. Although favoured by God, elected by His sovereignty, and called by His grace into a peculiar state of acceptance, they are still in the body, and they are made to feel it, being tempted in all points as other men are, and in some points peculiarly tried. They are men, and but men, at the best. They need comfort, too, because they are Christian men; for if others escape the rod, Christian men must not, yea, *shall not*. The Lord may be pleased to give to the sinner a long prosperity that he may be fattened as a bullock for the slaughter, but His promise to His people whom He calls by His grace is, 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquity.' 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.' We must needs, therefore, have special consolation, since as men, as but men, and as Christian men we shall have constant occasions for comfort.

When I take a text like this I know there are very many in the congregation who cannot enter into it; but, my dear friends, if you are Christians, it will not be long before you will. You may have to look back, perhaps, upon the words which I quote in your hearing, and say of them, 'God sent them to me as a preparation before the

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trial came ; He gave me food as He did Elias under the juniper tree, because He determined that I should go forty days in the strength of that meat.' Despise not thou the consolations of the Lord because thou needest them not just now. Thou wilt require them. The calm will not last for ever, a storm is brewing. Say not, ' My mountain standeth firm, I shall never be moved.' He has but to hide His face and thou wilt be troubled, and then thou wilt prize that which now thou dost lightly esteem ; thou wilt long to be comforted ' as one whom his mother comforteth.'

But coming at once to the text, I think we may very well talk of it under three points : first, who comforts ? secondly, how He comforts ; and, thirdly, where He comforts.

I. With regard to the first, WHO COMFORTS ? ' As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.'

The work of comforting His saints is not too mean for God to be engaged in. It is true He uses instruments, but all real comfort to a broken heart must come direct from God Himself. He does not say, ' I will send an angel to comfort you,' but, ' I will comfort you.' Nor in the text is it said that the Christian minister shall comfort you. Alas, dear brethren, what are we often who preach the Word but broken cisterns that hold no water ? But it is said, ' I will comfort you ;' and when God undertakes the work, then we become as conduit pipes that are full even to bursting with the drink

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that you require. Your soul shall be satisfied even out of poor earthen vessels. But it must be God's work; He must do it, for when a soul is truly humbled and heavily laden and broken in pieces by God's hand, there is one only hand—the pierced hand—that can heal the wound.

When we read in this passage that God will comfort the soul, we are to understand, I think, that *He does so in the trinity of His person*. He is called 'the God of all consolations.' The ~~Father~~ comforts us. The very use of that term 'Father' seems to bring good cheer to our spirits. As long as I can say 'my Father!' I shall not be without a star in my sky. 'My Father'—that sweetens all the sorrow that can come to me. It is a sword, but, my Father, it is in Thy hand. It is a bitter cup, but, my Father, Thou hast given it me, and shall I not drink it? That word, 'my Father,' shall make my heart leap for joy in the midst of my deepest distress. As a Father, God does actively come to the comfort of His children, and when a filial spirit is shed abroad in us, our souls, leaning on all sufficient grace, rejoice even in the midst of deep distress. God the Son also comforts us, for is His name not 'the Consolation of Israel?' When you stand at the foot of the cross you see comfort there for all the ills that wring your heart. Sin loses its weight; death itself is dead; all griefs expire, slain by the griefs of the Man of Sorrows. Only enter into the Saviour's passion and your own passion is over. Get to understand His sorrows,

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and your sorrows find at least a pause, if not an end. And as for the blessed Spirit, He was given for this very purpose—to be our Comforter; He dwells in all the saints to bring to their remembrance the things which Jesus spoke, and to lead them into all truth, that their joy in Christ may be full.

It is something very delightful to consider that Father, Son and Spirit all co-operate to give us comfort. I can understand their co-operating to make the world; I can understand their co-operation in the salvation of a soul; but I am astonished at this same united action in so comparatively small a matter as the comfort of believers. Yet the Holy Three seem to think it a great matter that believers should be happy, or they would not work together to cheer disconsolate spirits. 'I will comfort you.'

We must understand when God says, 'I will comfort you,' that He intends that *there are divers ways by which He does it*. Sometimes He comforts us in the course of Providence. We may be the lowest spoke of the wheel now, but by the revolution of time we may be the uppermost before long. We may suffer very acute pains to-night, but by the morning the Master may have assuaged all our pain. The pause between sickness and health may not be very long. If the Good Physician shall put His healing hand upon us we shall soon be restored. How often when you thought you were coming to your worst has there been a sudden brightening of the sky? It is a long lane that has no turning, and it is a long trouble

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that never comes to a close. It is when the sea ebbs as far as it can go that the tide begins to flow, and they say the darkest part of the night is that which is just before the daybreak. When the winter grows very cold and keen we begin to hope that spring will soon come, and our desperate sorrows when they reach their worst are coming to their close. So let us be of good cheer. There will not be always such a rough sea, poor troubled saint. You shall be out of the Atlantic into the Pacific ere long, and you shall be out of the seas altogether, and away on the *terra firma* of eternal joy before many years have rolled over your head.

However, when the Lord is not pleased thus to comfort us in the way of Providence, He has a means of doing it by His omnipotent secret working on the human heart. Not to speak doctrinally, but rather to give a particular instance, have not you found that sometimes when you were much burdened with trouble a very peculiar calm came over your spirit? You had been vexed, almost distracted, but when you woke one morning you felt calm and peaceful; you had given up rebellion, left off murmuring, and you could sing with Toplady:—

“Sweet to be passive in Thine hands
And know no will but Thine!”

And have you not been even conscious in times of the very severest trouble of an unusual joy? You did not sing with your voice, but there was some-

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thing that sang within you softly, silently, but still sweetly. You sometimes look back upon that sick chamber—(I know I do)—and almost wish that you were there now. The trial was sharp indeed:—

“Sharp are the pangs that nature gives,”—

but, oh the joy that came with them! It was so surpassing that in the retrospect you forget the pain and only remember the sweetness. How was this? Was it the pain that did it? Nothing of the kind. God is like a watchmaker who knows, because he made the watch, how to touch the wheels and regulate them; He made us, and therefore He knows how to deal with us that everything shall go right, where before everything went amiss. He can open the flood-gates of joy and inundate our souls with bliss, even in our darkest days of trouble. ‘Only hope thou in Me, My child,’ He says, ‘for thou shalt yet praise Me who am the help of Thy countenance and Thy God.’ Though the fig-trees do not blossom, and God does not take away the plague from the cattle, though still thy substance shall be minished and fire shall devour thy household goods, yet thy God can make up for all this, and cause thy days of leanness to be fat days, and thy days of hunger to be days of feasting, and thy days of thirst to be days when thou shalt drink the wine on the lees well refined.

It would not be well to close this point without remarking that *God has been pleased to make a*

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previous provision for the comfort of all His saints. When He comforts He has not to invent a novelty to do it; He has only to bring to us stores which have been laid up—fruits new and old which have been ready for His beloved. If trouble comes, God has provided a strength by which you shall meet it, and provided a way through which you shall escape from it. There are promises in God's Word suitable to every conceivable condition of the saints. Out of millions of God's people living in different countries and under different forms of government, and in different ages, all of them of different temperaments and constitutions, their trials must take all kinds of shapes. As in the kaleidoscope, there must be an infinite variety in the tribulations of the Lord's people, and yet there never has arisen a single case in which there has not been a promise which, word for word, and letter for letter, met the case in hand.

In the great bunch of keys in that good old book there is a key for every lock, and if it were not so, there are one or two promises like master keys which will fit all. Such a promise is the one we read just now, 'Fear not, I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God.' It will suit the youth and the hoary head; it will be satisfactory to you if you have to overcome difficulties or if you have to endure sufferings; in the calm or in the battle; lying in the trench or climbing the scaling ladder, that text will still be precious. 'Fear not,

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I am with thee ; be not dismayed, I am thy God.' We will fall back then upon the consolatory truth that with God are the consolations of His children—that He is Himself responsible for their comfort, having engaged to be their helper ; and so we may suck marrow out of our text, 'As one whom his mother comforteth so will I comfort you.'

II.' But now the second head is to be HOW GOD COMFORTS. 'As one whom his mother comforteth.' This is a peculiarly delightful metaphor. A father can comfort, but I think he is not much at home at the work. When God speaks about pity He selects the father, 'Like as a father pitieth his children.' But when he speaks about comfort He selects the mother. When I have seen the little ones sick I have felt all the pity in the world for them, but I did not know how to set to work to comfort them, but a mother knows by instinct how to do it. There is placed in the mother's tender heart a power of sympathy, and very soon she finds the word or gives the touch that will meet her darling's case and cheer its troubled soul. The father is awkward at it. Our rougher, sterner nature hardly skills in the matter of consolation, but the mother can do it to perfection. It is well, therefore, that the text selects the mother ; but there are other reasons besides. How, then, does the mother comfort her child?

We answer first, she does it *very fondly*. There is a way of administering comfort in which you stand apart from the patient, and you tell him, 'There is the cup of cordial if you like to drink it.'

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But the mother's way of doing it is to sip the cup and then to put it to the child's lips ; aye, and to do more than that—to take the child right into her bosom while she gives it. She does not talk to him at arm's length, but she talks with him at her heart all the while, and that probably is the secret of her power. And so when God comforts any poor heavy-laden sinner or troubled saint, He does not talk to them at a distance, but He runs and falls on their neck and kisses them. The infinite almighty God falls upon the neck of a repenting sinner, and gives him the kiss of His love ; and He does just the same to a poor, troubled, and afflicted saint. He comforts fondly. May one venture to apply such a word as that to the great God ? May we say that He has a fondness for His children ? Well, at any rate, we know that if there be a word more sweet, more dear, indicating a closer affinity and a deeper and purer love than another, we may use that word concerning our God. He loves us with a love that has no bottom, no summit, and no shore. Even as He loves His own dear Son, so loves He us. We are in His heart ; we are graven upon the palms of His hands ; and therefore, when He comforts, it is in so fond a manner that we cannot but be cheered. With all the tenderness a mother feels God feels for us, and so He comforts us as a mother comforts her child.

But there is more than fondness here. A mother comforts her child *very sympathizingly*. She always seems to feel the pain the child is feeling.

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To soothe that headache she lays her cool hand upon the hot, throbbing little brow, and is herself pained as she thinks of the pain that must be there ; or she looks at the hand that has been made to bleed by a fall, and her eyes seem as if they would bleed for the little one. She feels it all, and therefore she is sure to comfort well. And this is how Jesus comforts. We have heard of a little child who said to her mother, ' Mother, Mrs. So-and-so, the widow, says she likes me to go in for I comfort her so. When she sits and cries I put my head in her lap and I cry too ; and she says that comforts her.' Ah, yes, child, there is philosophy in that. This is just the sort of comfort we need, and this is just what God does. Our Lord in human flesh still sorrows with His people—hungers in their hunger—thirsts in their thirsting—and melts in their mourning. Though He reigns on high, He is not so high that He has no ' respect unto the lowly.'

A mother comforts her child also *very assiduously*. She is not satisfied with saying half a dozen words and putting her child down ; but she takes it up, and if it won't be dandled on one knee she tries the other, and if that form of comfort won't do, she will try another. We have heard of a good mother who wanted to teach her child something, and when it was complained that she had to repeat the same thing twenty times, she answered, ' Yes, I did that because nineteen times would not do.' So God perseveres. Sometimes a mother may have to comfort her child when it is very sick and very

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fretful, and its poor little head and heart are out of order. She has to comfort it again and again and again and again. The soft words are always on her lips. She can do nothing else but just console the little one, and she is not tired of it. Oh, those mothers of ours! They never do grow tired when we are sick and ill. They seem to be up all night and all day long, and if a nurse comes in for a few hours they are up then, too, looking after the nurse, so that I do not know that much ease comes with the helper. Our mothers are so untirably kind. Well, I say to you, to you 'who unto Jesus for refuge have fled,' that our God is kinder than any mother. His book is full of attempts to comfort his children, and those attempts—blessed be God—are not without success.

Again, a mother comforts her child *seasonably*. A true mother is not always comforting her child. If she is a silly mother she brings up her child so delicately that it turneth out a viper in her bosom; if she is a wise mother she saves her comforts till they are wanted. When it is sick then she gives the cordials. Well, God does not always comfort His saints, but when they are in affliction, then they shall have consolation. As our tribulations abound so our consolations abound by Jesus Christ. There is a balance kept up. If there be an ounce of trouble there will be an ounce of comfort; if there be a ton of trouble there will be a ton of consolation. When the child has been doing wrong and the parent has chastised

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it, if the little lip curls, if the proud foot is stamped, if there is a frown on the brow, the wise mother does not comfort it. But when the child comes and prays to be forgiven, the mother's heart is ready for it directly. 'Sin no more,' she says, 'and the past shall be forgotten and forgiven.' Well, this is how God comforts us. While we are proud and stand out against him, we shall feel His hand; but when we confess our faults and come humbly to Him for pardon, we shall have seasonable comfort, 'as one whom his mother comforteth.'

Again, a mother's comfort has this point about it—she comforts usually *in a most efficient manner*, and the child goes away smiling, though it seemed to say before, 'I shall never be happy again;' five minutes of a mother's wise talk and sweet comfort and the child is as happy as before. 'Ah,' you say, 'that will do for children, but it won't do for men.' But God keeps his saints as children before Him. God grant us to be as little children or we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven! Then when our God comes to comfort us I am quite sure he will do it more effectually than the most tender mother.

But once more. A mother comforts *all her life*. 'A mother is a mother all her life,' says an old proverb. There is no change there. 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?' It seems impossible, but were it possible, 'yet,' says God, 'I will not forget thee.' Never! A mother casts not away her child. Fathers sometimes have done

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such things, but mothers, I should hope, never. But even if they have—yea, saith the Lord :—

‘Should nature change
And mothers monsters prove,
Zion still dwells upon the heart
Of everlasting love.’

God will not cease to comfort His people. Perhaps there is a brother who is passing through very severe trial, and he thinks he shall never be comforted again. Well, but your mother won't forsake you, and do you think God will? ‘But,’ says one, ‘you do not know my difficulty; it is a crushing one.’ My dear friend, I know I do not know it, but your heavenly Father knows; and do you suppose, if an earthly mother sticks fast by her child, that He will leave you? Go to Him. His heart is as fond to you now as when you were on the mountain rejoicing in the full sunshine of His love. The very shadow of a change is unknown to Him. Go to Him with confidence and humble faith, and you shall find the text true, ‘As one whom his mother comforteth so will I comfort you.’

III. Now we have just a little to say upon the third point—that is, WHERE GOD COMFORTS His people. The text says, ‘In Jerusalem.’

Why, for His ancient people, that was *where they had their troubles*. The city had been besieged. O daughter of Salem, how wast thou made to weep! What sorrow rolled over thy head, to see the city dismantled and her palaces become ruins—wild fowls and bitterns inhabiting the place where

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once the assembled tribes were glad! Oh, Jerusalem, what grief is in thy name to thy inhabitants as they remember thee, the glory all departed, and the sorrow lasting still! Yes, but God will comfort His people in the very place of their trouble. This will be fulfilled on a large scale in the millennial glory when this, our world, which has been the scene of the saints' sorrow, will be also the scene of their triumphant reign with Christ Jesus.

Meanwhile, you, His servants, must not suppose that because you have trial you are in the wrong place. The vine is not in the wrong place because the vine-dresser often uses the knife; it may be the best place for that vine where it gets most of the vine-dresser's trimming. Beware, young friends especially, beware of self-will in seeking to change your troubles. Some of you think when you are single you have peculiar troubles. Do not be in a hurry to incur the troubles of married life! And you who are servants think you are very hardly done by. Do not be so wondrously fast to wish to be masters. I sometimes find my cross not just what I like it to be, but I should be very much afraid to attempt to alter it. 'Twere better in all wisdom 'to bear the ills we have than fly to others that we know not of.' That man whom you envy you would probably pity if you knew more about him. Be content to stop in Jerusalem. Remember, the comfort which God gives will be a comfort to suit your present place

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and position. 'In Jerusalem,' where you have seen the furnace of God placed, for His fire is in Zion and His furnace in Jerusalem, even there shall you have your comfort. It is a joy to think of Daniel in the lion's den; I believe that Daniel never had a sweeter night's rest than he had when he had some old lion for his pillow and the younger lions to be his guardians. And in the case of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the Master did not break down the furnace walls and take them out at once, but He was with them in the fire, and cheered them in the midst of the flames. So shall the comfort of God come to you in your time of need.

Another view of this. God will comfort you who are here below. 'Oh, had I the wings of a dove!' says one. Now what would you do if you had them? They would be a very awkward equipment for a man; but suppose you had the wings of a dove, what would you do? Would you fly away? Well, you would hardly dare to do that, for to fly to God without a permit would be taking the matter into your own hands. Why cannot God comfort you where you are? 'Ah,' says one, 'I expect to have my happiness in another world.' So do I, but I hope to have some here, too. 'One heaven will be enough for me,' says one. But why not have heaven here and heaven hereafter too?

'The men of grace have found
Glory begun below.
Celestial fruits on earthly ground
From faith and hope may grow.

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'Then let our songs abound,
And every tear be dry.
We're marching through Emmanuel's ground
To fairer worlds on high.'

It is true the fairer worlds are on high, but it is equally true that we are on Emmanuel's land even now. 'In Jerusalem'—the place of your trials—'will I comfort you.'

And now, to come to another meaning of the passage, 'In Jerusalem, that is, *in the church of God.*' The richest comforts are reserved for those who, fearing the Lord, speak often one to another, and are not ashamed to own His name. And I think, dear friends, the place of comfort is the assembly of God's people. Therefore live, 'not forgetting the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is.' There are people in the world who never go out to a service in the week evening—never think of such a thing. They get by the fireside after the day's business, and there they sit and say, 'Well, my soul is full of doubts and fears. I cannot rejoice as I used to do:—

"What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!"

and so on. Now, those people expect God to come to their house and comfort them. By what reason should they expect any such thing when they refuse to go to God's house for the comfort? Our Lord will sometimes withhold a sense of His presence from us in order to make us feel our wrongdoing in staying away from the use of the means

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which He has appointed for our comfort and consolation. I would that all congregations came out as well as you usually do. I must not say anything to *you* about not coming out on a week night, for you do come, and anything I might say about people not coming would be like Dean Swift's sermon about those who go to sleep in church. When he finished it, he thought he had done no good, for, said he, 'Only you that were awake have heard.'

I would rather propose to you that whenever you meet a friend who is greatly in lack of comfort, and is complaining that he has not got it, you would give as judicious a hint as you can that it may be that they miss the comfort who miss the means of grace. He who will not go to the shop and buy cannot wonder if he has not any oil for his lamp. He who will not take the trouble to go to the stream must not parley if he has to suffer thirst. Oh, let us, dear friends, as often as we can, gather together with the Lord's people in praise and prayer. No doubt 'in Jerusalem' we shall find our comfort. There are those among you to whom it does one good to listen when you speak of your enjoyments in this house. Of course, there are some who are not edified by the ministry here, but if that is the case why do they not go somewhere else? Their seats could be filled by others who would be edified. But there are some who say, 'Master, it does us good to come here, and we can bless the Lord that He makes the place of His feet

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glorious. We long for Sunday to come round again, for we feel the place to be like an Elim.' In your case, God always makes His house to be a fountain of living waters to your souls and streams from Lebanon.

To that end, I pray the Master to help all His servants! Pray for your ministers, but remember that the comfort cannot come from them. It may come *through* them, but it must come from the Master Himself. With that exhortation, we will come back to the words of the text and the gracious promise, 'As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you, and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem.'

May God add His blessing, and bring troubled sinners to look to Christ, and Christ shall have the glory!

III

Cheer for Despondency

'Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.'—
PROVERBS XXVII. 1.

WHAT a great mercy it is that we do not know 'what a day may bring forth'! We are often thankful for knowledge, but in this case we may be particularly grateful for ignorance. It is the glory of God, we are told, to conceal a thing, and it most certainly is for the happiness of mankind that He should conceal their future. Supposing that bright lines were written for us in the book of destiny, and that we could read those bright lines now, and be sure of them, we should probably loiter away our time until we arrived at them, and should have no heart for the present. If, on the other hand, we knew that there were dark days of trouble in store for us, and had a presentiment and full conviction as to when they would come, probably the thought of them would overshadow the present, so that the joys which we now drink would be left untasted by reason of our nervous fears as to the distant future. To know the

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good might lead us to presumption, to know the evil might tempt us to despair. Happy for us is it that our eyes cannot penetrate the thick veil which God hangs between us and to-morrow, that we cannot see beyond the spot where we now are, and that, in a certain sense, we are utterly ignorant as to the details of the future. We may, indeed, be thankful for our ignorance.

Although, however, we do not know what a day may bring forth, though we cannot see into what I may call 'the immediate future,' yet we have reason to be thankful that we do know something about what is to come, and that we do know what is in the far-reaching future. We differ from the brutes in this respect. When, two or three nights in the week, I pass on my way home a flock of sheep, or a little herd of bullocks, all going down to the butcher's, travelling in the cold, bright moonlight towards the slaughter-house, I feel thankful that they do not know where they are going, for what would be their misery if they knew anything about death. The lamb's thoughts are in the fold, and all unconscious of the shambles; it licks the hand that smites it, not knowing of its coming speedy death. It is the happiness of the brute not to know the future.

But in our case we know that we must die, and if it were not for the hope of the resurrection and of the hereafter, this knowledge would distinguish us from the brutes only by giving us greater misery. There must be an intention on

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God's part for us to live in a future state, or else He would, out of mere benevolence, have left us ignorant of the fact of death. If He had not meant our souls to begin to prepare for another and a better existence, He would have kept us ignorant even of the fact that this will pass away ; but, having given us an intellect and a mind which, both from observation and inward consciousness, must know that death will come, we believe that He would have us prepare for that which will follow, and look out for that which is beyond. We do know the future in its great rough outlines. We know that, if the Lord cometh not first, we shall die ; we know that our soul shall live for ever in happiness or in sin, and that according to whether we are found in Christ or without Christ, our eternal portion shall be one of never-ending agony, or of ceaseless bliss. We may be thankful that we do know this, so that we may be prepared for it ; but still—to return to that with which we started—we may be thankful also that we do not really know the great future in its details, that it is shut from our eye lest it should have an evil influence upon our life.

Now, Solomon, in the Book of Proverbs, applied the truth that we know not to-morrow, to the boasters—the men who said, ‘ To-morrow I will go into such a city, and buy and sell, and get gain, and then go to another city and get gain, and then when I have amassed so much wealth I will say, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years ; take thine ease ; eat, drink, and be merry.’

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Solomon seems to come in and put his hand upon the man's shoulders, and to say, virtually, 'Thou fool! thou knowest nothing about this; thou dost not know what shall be on the morrow; thy goods may never come to thee, or thou mayest not be here to trade with these goods at all; so thou build'st a castle in the air; thou thinkest thy fancies are true; thou art as one that dreams of a feast and wakes to find himself hungry! How canst thou be so foolish.' Solomon dwells upon the text very solemnly, and says, 'Boast not thyself of the morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.'

I do not intend, however, to use the text with this object to-night. It struck me that as Solomon uses it here with one design it might be very properly used for another, that as he intends to shame our growing pride and certainty of prosperity, so it might be used especially to cheer those who have a tendency to gloom, and to shed a ray of light into the thick darkness of their fear.

I. It will, first, comfort THOSE WHO ARE FEARING AND TREMBLING CONCERNING SOME EVIL WHICH IS YET TO COME.

My friend, thou art afraid to-night; thou canst not enjoy anything thou hast because of this terrible and fearful shadow which has come across thy path of an evil which thou sayest is coming to-morrow, or in one or two months' time, or even in six months. Now, at the very worst thou art not quite certain that it will come, for thou knowest not what may be

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on the morrow. Thou art as alarmed and as afraid as if thou wert quite certain that it would appear. But it is not so. Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth, and *since it is uncertain whether it shall be or not*, hadst thou not better leave thy sorrow till it is certain, and meanwhile leave the uncertain matter in the hand of God, whose divine purposes will be wise and good in the end, and will be even seen to be so? At the very least, slender as the comfort may be, yet still there is comfort in the fact that thou knowest not what may be on the morrow.

Let us just expand this thought a little to those of you who are fearing about to-morrow. We very often fear what never will occur. I think that the major part of our troubles are not those which God sends us, but those which we invent for ourselves. As the poet speaks of some who

‘Feel a thousand deaths in fearing one,’

so there are many who feel a thousand troubles in fearing one trouble, which trouble, perhaps, never will have any existence except in the workshop of their own misty brain. It is an ill task for a child to whip himself; it might be good for him to feel the whip from his father’s hand, but it is of little service when the child applies it himself. And yet, very often the strokes which we dread never do come from God’s hand at all, but are the pure inventions of our own imagination and our own unbelief working together. There are more who have to

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howl under the lash of unbelief than there are who have to weep under the gentle rod of God's providential dispensation. Now, why shouldest thou go about to fill thy pillow with thorns grown in thine own garden? Why so busy, good Sir, about gathering nettles with which to strew thine own bed? There are clouds enough without thy thinking that every little atom of mist will surely bring a tempest. There are difficulties enough on the road to heaven without thy taking up stones to throw into thine own path to make thine own road more rough than there was any need that it should be. Thou knowest not what may be on the morrow. Thy fears are absurd. Perhaps thy neighbour knows they are absurd, but certainly thou oughtest to know so, too. Dost thou not know that the trouble thou art dreading God can utterly avert? Perhaps to-morrow morning there will come a letter which will entirely change the face of the matter. A friend may interpose where least thou couldest expect one, or difficulties which were like mountains may be cast into the depths of the sea. Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth, and the trouble which thou so much darest may never occur at all.

Moreover, dost thou not know that even *if the trouble should come, God has a way of overruling it?* So that even thou, poor trembler, shalt stand by and see the salvation of God, and wonder at two things—thine own unbelief and God's faithfulness? Thou sayest that the sea is before thee,

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that the mountains are on either hand, and that the foe is behind thee, but thou knowest not what shall be on the morrow. Thy God shall lead thee through the depths of the sea, and put such a song into thy mouth as thou never couldest have known if there had been no sea, and no Pharaoh, and no mountains to shut thee in. These trials of thine shall be the wine-press out of which shall come the wine of consolation to thee. This furnace shall rob thee of nothing but thy dross, which thou wilt be glad to be rid of, but thy pure gold shall not be diminished so much as a drachm, but shall only be the purer after it all. The trouble, then, may not come to thee at all, or if it come it may be overruled.

And there is one thing more, supposing the trial does come, *thy God has promised that as thy days so shall thy strength be.* Hath He not said it many times in His Word, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee'? He never did promise thee freedom from trouble. He speaks of rivers and of thy going through them. He speaks of fires and of thy passing through them, but He has added, 'When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.' What matters it to thee, then, whether there be fire or not if thou be not burned? What matters it to thee whether there are floods or not if thou be not drowned? As long as thou escapest with spiritual

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life and health, and comest up out of all thy trials the better for them, thou mayest rejoice in tribulations. Thank God when thy temptations abound, and be glad when He putteth thee into the furnace because of the blessing which thou art sure to receive from it. So then, since thou knowest not what may be on the morrow, take thou heart, thou fearing one, and put thy fears away. Do as thou hast been bidden, delight thyself in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thy heart. Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain thee. He will never suffer the righteous to be moved. Did not David say, speaking by the Holy Ghost, 'Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all'? I charge thee, therefore, to be of good comfort, since thou knowest not what may be on the morrow. This word to fearful saints.

II. But now we will use the text to another class of Christians whose painful position really deserves more pity than that of those who only invent their fears, or who are troubled about the future. I mean THOSE WHO ARE AT THE PRESENT MOMENT DISCONSOLATE THROUGH IMMEDIATE DISTRESS AND PRESENT AFFLICTION.

We little know, my brethren, when we gather here, how many cases of distress may be assembled in this house at any one time. Verily the poor have not ceased out of the land. The poor we have always with us, and some of the poor, too, who need to have other mouths to speak for them, since

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from their very independence of spirit and their Christian character they are slow to speak for themselves. There may be a trouble in my neighbour's heart which is almost bursting it while I am sitting peacefully still enjoying the Word. We should remember those who are bound as bound with them, and then sympathise with those who are troubled as being ourselves also in the body.

It will not be a waste of time, then, if I say to *you who are troubled about worldly matters*, that there is comfort for you in this passage. Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. Thou sayest, 'It is all over with me; I will give up in despair.' No, friend, do not do so for one day longer, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth, and if to-morrow bring thee not deliverance, hope on at least for one day more, for thou knowest not what *a day* may bring forth. And I would keep on with the same tale till the last day of life. At least for one day more there is no room for despair. You cannot conclude that God has forsaken you, or that providence has utterly turned against you. At least you know not what may be on the morrow, so wait till you have seen that day out. Give not up yourself a hopeless victim to despair till you have seen what to-morrow may bring you.

What unexpected turns there have been in the lives of those who have trusted in God. You who are trusting in yourselves may help yourselves as best you can, but you who are trusting in

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God have ample reasons to expect that God will come to your assistance. It is yours to watch, and yours to work as if everything depended upon you, but it is yours also to remember that everything does not depend upon you. Sometimes God has come in to help His servants so exactly at what we call 'the nick of time,' that they have hardly been able to believe their own senses. 'Strange!' they say; 'it is like a miracle,' and so, indeed, it is, for the difference between the old dispensation and the new is that God used to work His wonders by suspending the laws of nature, whereas now He does greater things than this, inasmuch as He achieves His purposes quite as marvellously, and lets the laws of nature remain as they are. He does not make the ravens bring His people bread and meat, but He lets them have their bread and their meat somehow. It was a clumsy way, if I may so speak, to use the ravens, but it is a diviner way to use the common things of this life to achieve the same end.

God does not nowadays make the manna drop down from heaven; no doubt some people would like Him to do so, but still He brings the manna for all that, and there is the bread, and there is the raiment, and therewith should the Christian be content. He supplies His people's needs by ordinary means, and herein is He to be wondered at and to be adored. Look up, then. Wipe away that tear. Do not talk for a moment of murmuring against God. Do not go home with that sorry tale to your wife and children, and tell them that God is

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not faithful to you. Wait till to-morrow, at any rate, for 'thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.'

And to *you who are disconsolate about spiritual things* I might quote the same text. You say, 'Ah! I have been hearing the Word very long, and all that I have got from it is a sense of sin, or hardly that! Oh! how I wish that God would bless the Word to my soul! I am longing to be saved! What would I not give to be a Christian, a true and sincere Christian, one in whom the Spirit of God has wrought a new heart and a right spirit! Oh!' you say, 'I have sought it by listening to the Word, and I have sought it in earnest prayer; but months have passed, and I have made no advance; I have no more hope now than I had long ago; I seem as far off the attainment of eternal life as I was when first I heard the Word; nay, if possible, I am still farther off; the Word has been a savour of death unto death to me, and not a savour of life unto life.' Well, my dear friend, do not give up listening to the Word; do not give up treading the courts of the Lord's house, for if thou hast hitherto got no blessing, yet, being in the way, the Lord may yet meet with thee, for thou knowest not what may be on the morrow.

How many years those poor creatures waited round the pool when they expected that an angel would, at a certain season, come and trouble the water! There they waited, and though they were disappointed scores of times by others stepping in,

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yet, seeing it was the only hope they had, they waited still. Now, it is in the use of the means that *you* are likely to get a blessing. 'Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.' Do not, therefore, be persuaded to cease hearing, for thou knowest not what may be on the morrow. The very next sermon thou shalt hear may be the means of thine enlightenment. The very next address at the prayer-meeting may give thee encouragement. The very next time the Gospel-trumpet sounds thou mayest find thy liberty, and what a blessing will that liberty be! When thou dost find it thou wilt say it was well worth waiting for! Let me add another word—do not give up praying. It is a common device of Satan to say to the soul, 'The Lord will never hear you; you are one of the reprobate; he has never written your name in the Book of Life.' Soul, pray as long as you have breath. Let it be your firm resolve to remain at the throne of grace. Say to thyself:—

'If I perish I will pray,
And perish only there.'

It is not said that the gate of mercy will open to the first knock. If it were there would be no room for the virtue of importunity. But the Lord, who delights in our importunity, encourages us with the promise that one day the gate will be opened. 'Ask and *it shall be given to you*; seek and ye *shall find*; knock, and *it shall be opened to you*.'

And who knows how soon this may be! Why, before you close your eyes to-night you may be

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able to look to Christ crucified and find peace. Instead of the weeping prayer at the bedside, there may be a happy prayer of another kind, not in tears of sorrow, but with tears of holy joy, to think that the Lord has enlightened your darkness, that you have looked unto Christ, and now your face is not ashamed? Why not? Why should it not be to-night? Why should it not be on the morrow? God grant, poor disconsolate one, that it may be so.

At any rate, wilt thou let me repeat the advice I have already given? Since thou canst not know that God will not hear thee; since it never was revealed to any man, and never will be, that God will not regard his cry; if thou canst get no farther that the men of Nineveh, yet go on, and, 'who can tell' what may be, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. I will tell thee one thing, and thou mayest take it as being God's own truth, if thou goest to Christ empty-handed, guilty, and willing to take all thy salvation from Him as a free gift, and if thou castest thyself upon Him, I will tell thee what the day will bring forth. It will bring forth eternal life to thee—salvation, joy, and peace. It will bring forth adoption, for thou shalt be received into the divine family. It will bring forth to thee the foretaste of the heaven which God has prepared for His people. Thou shalt know a blessed day here that shall be a foretaste of a never-ending day hereafter, a day that shall be as one of the days of heaven upon earth.

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I wish that the Lord would bless these words of mine to disconsolate ones. I think there may be some here who may be sustained for awhile and kept up by what I have said, but, better still, if they shall now be filled with a desperate resolve to cast themselves at the foot of the cross, then little do they know what the day will bring forth! They cannot imagine the joy they shall have, nor the peace they shall receive. The pardon which Christ shall give them is far more rich than they have thought it could be, and the success with which their prayers shall be crowned is far more marvellous than even their best hopes have conceived. 'Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth!'

III. Now, thirdly, turning this time, not to those who are fearing the future, nor yet to those who are disconsolate about present affliction, I thought of addressing a few words to **THOSE WHO ARE TOIL-WORN IN THE MASTER'S SERVICE.**

I can scarcely sympathize, as I could wish to do, with those who have worked for Christ unsuccessfully. To say, 'Master, I have toiled all the night and taken nothing' has never been my lot, and therefore I can only speak from what I suppose to be the feeling of unsuccessful men. For these many years I have been preaching the Gospel in this great London, and I know not that at any time God has blessed us more than He is blessing us now, neither can I even say that at any time He has blessed us less, for it seems as if He has always

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been giving us more than we can receive, and blessing the Word exceeding abundantly above what we asked or even thought. There is room for nothing in my case but for gratitude and for encouragement, for humble dependence upon God for the future and adoring joy for the past and the present.

But what hard work it must be for a minister or a Sunday-school teacher to go on preaching and labouring positively without success, or with so little that it is only like a cluster here and there upon the topmost bough. I can imagine such brethren and sisters feeling that they can speak no more in the name of the Lord, and as they weep over their failure, with Isaiah saying, 'Who hath believed our report, and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?' I should not wonder but that my text may whisper in their ears a comfortable thought, 'Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.'

Do not cease from thy labour, dear brother! Thou art fainting to-day; *to-morrow thou mayest arise with new strength*; or feeling as if thou wert but weakness itself in the morning, though thou mayest hardly know how it came about, in the evening thou mayest be happy and cheerful. The Divine presence may overshadow thy heart, and drive thy fears away, consoling thee in thy distress, and making thee feel as if it were well to be God's servant even if one had no present reward. And what if, coming at the back of this, thou shouldest find thyself, next time thou goest to thy work,

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discharging it with an unusual zest, and with a sacred power? What if the pulpit, instead of being as it has been, a prison to thee, should suddenly come to be a palace? What if, instead of being a mere bush in the wilderness, God should dwell in the bush and make thee all a-blaze, like that unconsumed fire which Moses saw? What if the stammering tongue should suddenly be unloosed, and the cold heart be all on a glow with Divine enthusiasm? What if the poor tongue of clay should suddenly become a tongue of fire? What a change it would be! Ah! but 'thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.' Thou canst not tell!

And what if, whilst thou art thus thyself quickened, *there may fall a like spirit upon the people*, upon the children in the class, upon the hearers in the house of prayer? What if, instead of the dull, leaden eyes, which looked as if death itself were gazing from them,—what if, instead of stony and motionless hearers, there should suddenly be a holy sensitiveness given to the people—what wouldest thou say to that? Yet why should there not be? Sometimes such grace comes all at once. The rock has been smitten; for long it would not break, but, on a sudden, there has come a blow of the hammer, and that, perhaps, not so hard as many that have fallen before, but it has hit the stone in the right place, and lo the stone flies to shivers? 'Oh!' you say, 'I could keep on at my work if I thought that this would happen.' Keep on at your work, then, brother, for you do not know what will

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come next. Pray for great things, and you may then expect them. You may not make sure of such blessing, of course, if you have not prayed for it, but, having sought it, why should it not come?

Therefore keep at the work. I believe all Sunday-school teachers find that sometimes such sudden meltings come over their classes, and ministers often realize that on a sudden, they scarcely know how, there is a change in the very aspect of the hearers, so that it is quite a different thing to preach. I am very conscious of the difference there is between the various congregations I address. Almost every day, and sometimes twice a day, I am preaching. Occasionally it is dreadful misery because, say what we will, we know we have not a sympathizing audience. We feel as though we were a plough dragging over the rough ground, but when we feel that the Spirit of God is there, then we realize we are sowing the good seed, that it is falling on good ground, and we expect the joyful sheaves which are to be our reward. And yet, brethren, we are as much the servants of God when we are doing the one thing as when we are doing the other, and are as much in his service when we are unsuccessful as when we are successful. We are not responsible to God for the souls that are saved, but we are responsible for the Gospel that is preached, and for the way in which we preach it. And 'who can tell,' whether those of us who have been least successful may not suddenly exchange our heavy toil for the most

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delightful service, for we know not what a day may bring forth.

And how dost thou know, my brother, what may yet happen? Thou wert saying, this morning, 'It is a dark age for the church!' Well, so it is. You were saying, 'I believe it is quite a crisis.' So it is. Every year, in fact, seems to be a crisis. 'Ah!' you say, 'but there are peculiar dangers now.' No doubt there are, and I think the oldest man here recollects that there were peculiar dangers when he was a boy; there always have been, and always will be peculiar dangers. But, if there is danger from this revival of ritualism—and no doubt there is—yet, who among us can tell what a day may bring forth? Are we certain that God will not yet turn back the tide of Romanising error? Are we sure that he has not got a man somewhere, or even fifty men, who should be the instruments of this? Has it not often occurred that the very men who have been the very hottest advocates of a certain system have afterwards been the very greatest enemies of that system? The Christian Church could never have expected to get an apostle from among the Pharisees, and, least of all, could they have supposed that they would find in Saul of Tarsus, the blood-thirsty persecutor, the great apostle of the Gentiles, not one whit behind the very chiefest of the twelve. You and I do not know what God has in store. *There may be somewhere at this very moment a man, unknown to you, who is reading the Word, and, as he reads*

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it, he may, like the monk Luther, get such light through the reading that he who once helped to build up will be the instrument in God's hand to destroy. I am getting more and more hopeful about these matters. I entertain the most sanguine expectation that the God who has put His enemies to defeat in years gone by will do it now once again, and instead of sitting down in anything like heaviness of spirit, or oppression of heart, I would speak hopefully, and have you, my brethren, feel hopefully, for we do not know what a day may bring forth. Suddenly the whole current of the public mind may be turned.

There may come a great tide of conversions, which shall be the strength and the joy of the Christian Church. On a sudden, slumbering churches may awake; gracious revivals may come upon the land; the holy fire may once again descend from heaven. The Christian Church may start up to find that the God Who answered by fire is still in her midst. The mourning Christian may put off his ashes and sackcloth and put on his beautiful array, and a shout of joy may go up, 'Hallelujah! Hallelujah!' where you and I expected to hear nothing but 'Crucify Him! Crucify Him!'

Let us, then, if we are working for the Master, instead of growing tired with service, hear Him say, 'Be not weary in well doing, for in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not.' Let us, my beloved brethren, 'be stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as

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we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord.' You know not how soon you shall see this success, for you know not what a day may bring forth. I hope every city missionary who hears me, every Bible-woman, every minister, every tract-distributor, every Sunday-school teacher, will try and look this very sweet thought in the face. Expect that God is going to do great things, and He will do them, for He does very much according to His people's expectations. 'According to your faith shall it be done unto you.'

IV. By your patience we will now say a word or two, in the fourth place, to THOSE WHO ARE DISPIRITED IN PRAYER, to some who have been engaged in special supplication for some object, but who up till now have received no answer, and are ready to give up. Let me encourage such to persevere by repeating to them the words of Solomon: 'Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.'

There is a story I have often heard told by our Methodist friends of a woman who had long prayed for her husband. She resolved that she would pray for him every day a certain number of times, I think it was for ten years, and that after that she would pray no longer, supposing that if her prayer were not heard by that time it would be an intimation that God did not intend to grant the blessing. I do not think she was right in setting any limit to God at all, or that she had any right so to act. However, on this occasion, God winked at His

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servant's infirmity and, so the story goes—and I do not doubt its correctness—that on the day on which she was to cease from prayer her husband suddenly turned thoughtful, and asked her the question which she had so longed to hear from him, 'What must I do to be saved?' I am sure that those who have watched over their success in prayer will have met with cases quite as startling as that—things which your neighbour would not believe if you were to tell him, but which you treasure up amongst those inward experiences which are true to you, however improbable they may seem to other people. You know, dear friends, that you have obtained answers to prayer, very singular ones, and have obtained them very promptly and very punctually. You have had your prayers met just as an honest merchant meets his bills, down on the nail. On the expected day God has met with you, and given you what you wanted, and what you sought for, just at the very time you needed it.

But now I can suppose that you are tried. That dear child of yours, instead of hopefully rewarding your prayers, seems to be going from bad to worse. Perhaps, dear brother, it is your son—and I know there are many such cases; the devil has told you that it is no use to pray for him, for God will never hear you. Or else, good sister, it is your brother, and your prayer for him has been incessant; indeed, it has been a constant burden on your mind. Now, in such cases, may I charge you, may I earnestly entreat you never to listen to the malicious

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insinuation of Satan that 'you may as well leave off praying, for you will not be heard,' for at the very least, and I am now putting it on the very lowest ground possible, 'Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.' You cannot tell but that the hard heart may yet soften, and the rebellious will be subdued. You would be surprised to go home and find your son converted, would you not? Well, but such things have occurred. You would be surprised if your wife came in some Sunday evening, and said, 'I have been hearing So-and-so, and God has met with me.' Yet why should it not be so? Is anything too hard for the Lord? Is His arm shortened that it cannot save? Is His ear heavy that it cannot hear? Even if you should die without seeing your children converted, or your dear ones brought in, you do not know even then what a day may bring forth. They may be converted after you are dead, and it will tend, possibly, to swell the joy of heaven when you shall see them, after years of wandering still brought to follow their father, their father whom in life they despised, but whom after he was gone they came to imitate. Persevere in prayer, Christian. 'Men ought always to pray and not to faint.' Praying breath is never spent in vain. Still besiege the throne. The city may hold out for awhile, but prayer should capture it. Beleaguer the throne of grace; it is to be taken. Never raise the siege until you get the blessing: the blessing shall certainly be yours.

V. And now I cannot talk longer on this matter,

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so I will close with just another thought to THOSE OF US WHO ARE CHEERFUL AND HAPPY.

I hope there are many of us who are neither afraid and fretting about the future, nor depressed about the present, neither worn out with toil in the Master's service, nor dispirited in prayer. There are some of us to whom the Lord is so gracious that our cup runneth over. Now, we may just put another drop on the top of the full cup. Dear friend, 'thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.' It may perhaps bring forth to you and to me our last day. What a blessed day that would be—our last day! Our dying day! No, do not call it so, but the day of our translation, the day of our great change, the day of our being taken up, the day of our being carried away in the fiery chariot to be for ever with the Lord! It is not very far from here to heaven. There was one sister who went from this place to heaven in a minute, ay, less than that. It is not far to heaven. A sigh will take us there. Just let the breath be stopped, and we are there.

'One gentle sigh the fetters breaks,
We scarce can say "they're gone";
Before the willing spirit takes
Her mansion near the throne.'

The journey occupies no time. We do but leave the body and we are at once for ever with the Lord. There is no tarrying on the road, no quarantine in which we shall be delayed for an interval before

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we are allowed to enter heaven. Christ said to the dying thief, 'To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.' We are but gone from earth and are found in heaven. We do but close our eyes below and open them in the world above. Thou knowest not but what this may be thy case to-morrow. Oh, what joy! I am doubting and fearing to-day, but I may see His face to-morrow, and see it so as never to lose sight of it again. From my poor tenement of poverty I am going to the mansions of eternal blessedness. From the sick-bed, where I have tossed in pain, I shall mount to everlasting joy. The streets of gold may be trodden to-morrow, and the palm branch of victory may be waved to-morrow, the streets trodden by these weary feet, and the palm branch waved by these toil-worn hands—to-morrow.

Yes, to-morrow the chants of angels may be in your ears, and the swell of celestial music may make glad your soul. To-morrow you may see the beatific vision, and may behold the King in His beauty in the land that is very far off. I do like to live in the constant anticipation of being with Christ, which is far better. Do not put it off, Christian, as though it were far away. If we had to wait a hundred years they would soon pass like a watch in the night. But we shall not live so long as that. We may be with our Lord to-morrow. We may sup here on earth, and breakfast in heaven. We may breakfast on earth, and hear Christ say, 'Come and dine,' or we may go from our table here

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to the great Supper of the Lamb above, to be with Him *for ever*, world without end.

This is the best of it. When somebody said to a Christian minister, 'I suppose you are on the wrong side of fifty?' 'No,' he said, 'thank God, I am on the right side of fifty, for I am sixty, and am therefore nearer heaven.' Old age should never be looked upon with dismay by us, it should be our joy. If our hearts were right in this matter, instead of being at all afraid at the thought of parting from this life, we should say,

'Ah me! ah me that I
In Kedar's tents here stay!
No place like this on high!
Thither, Lord! guide my way.
O happy place!
When shall I be,
My God, with Thee,
And see Thy face?'

We should be looking for the coming of our Lord, and waiting for his appearing, feeling that we know not what a day may bring forth.

Now, I have no time to speak to others here who are not concerned in these sweet themes, but I will at least say this. Let the careless and thoughtless here remember that *they* do not know what a day may bring forth. To-morrow it may not be that grand party to which you are intending to go; to-morrow it may not be that sweet sin of which your evil nature is thinking; to-morrow may see you on a sick-bed. To-morrow may see you on

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your dying bed. To-morrow, worst of all, may see you in hell! Oh, sinner! what a state to live in, to be in daily jeopardy of eternal ruin, to have the wrath of God, Who is always angry with you, abiding on you ; and not to know but that to-morrow you may be where you can find no escape, no hope, no comfort. To-morrow in eternity! To-morrow banished from His presence! To-morrow to have that awful sentence thrilling in the soul, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'

'Come guilty souls, and flee away
Like doves to Jesu's wounds;
This is the welcome gospel-day,
In which free grace abounds.

God loved the Church, and gave His Son
To drink the cup of wrath:
And Jesus says, He'll cast out none
That come to Him by faith.'

IV

Christ Looseth from Infirmities

'And behold there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And He laid his hands on her : and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.'—LUKE xiii. 11, 12, 13.

OUR text commences with a 'behold'—
O 'Behold there was a woman,' and, as it was often remarked by the Puritan writers, whenever we see the word 'behold' in Scripture, we are to regard it as a *nota bene*, as a mark in the margin calling our particular attention to what follows. Where Christ worked wonders we should have attentive eyes and ears. When Jesus is dispensing blessings, whether to ourselves or to others, we should never be in a state of indifference.

I shall use this miracle as a type, as it were, for doubtless the miracles of Christ were so intended. Our Lord was declared to be 'a prophet mighty in word and in deed.' In this He was to be a prophet

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like unto Moses, and, in fact, He is the only one like unto Moses in these two respects. Many prophets followed Moses who were mighty in 'word'—such as Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and Isaiah, but then they were not 'mighty in deed.' Many, on the other hand, were 'mighty in deed'—like Elijah and Elisha, but they were not 'mighty in word.' Our Lord was mighty in both respects, and a prophet in both respects—'a prophet mighty in word and deed.' I take it, therefore, that His miraculous deeds are parts of His prophecies. They are the illustrations of His great life-sermon. The words which fell from His lips are as the text and the letter of the book, but the miracles are the pictures from which our childlike minds may often learn more than from the words themselves.

We shall so use the picture before us now, and may the Holy Spirit give us instruction.

I. In the first place, this woman, bowed down with a spirit of infirmity, **TYPIFIES TO US THE CASE OF VERY MANY**—very many whom we have seen, and some of whom are listening to these words—(oh! that the same miracle might be wrought in them as in her)—persons who are depressed in spirit, who cannot look up to heaven and rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ; persons who have a hope, a good hope, too, but not a strong one, a hope which enables them to hold on, as they did in Paul's shipwreck, when on the boards and broken pieces of the ship they came safe to land, but not a hope which gives them an abundant entrance into the

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kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. They are saved—like this woman, who was a true daughter of Israel, notwithstanding all her infirmities; who was truly of the promised seed, notwithstanding that she could not lift up herself; so these are genuine Christians, truly saved, and yet constantly subject to infirmity.

In some it takes this shape. They believe in Christ, and rest on the precious blood, and yet *they are afraid sometimes that they have sinned the unpardonable sin*. Though their better and more reasonable selves will do battle against the delusion, still they hug it to their hearts. Seeing that the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is a sin which is unto death, and that when a man has committed it his spirit dies, and that repentance, the desire to be saved, and all good emotions cease to be when that dreadful spiritual death occurs, I say that they can thus reason with themselves in their better moments, and see that their fear is a delusion, but anon they fall back again into that dreadful slough. They see not signs of grace, but they think they see signs of reprobation.

Many have I met with—I may say I meet with such every week—who *are afraid that they are hypocrites*. When I encounter persons troubled with this fear, I cannot help smiling at them, for if they really were hypocrites they would not be afraid of it, and their fear of presumption argues very strongly that they are not living in it.

Then this infirmity will take another shape. If

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you drive them from the other errors, they say *they are afraid that they are self-deluded*. This is a very proper fear when it leads to self-examination and comes to an end; but it becomes a very improper fear when it perpetually destroys our joy, prevents our saying, 'Abba, Father,' with an unfaltering tongue, and keeps us at a distance from the precious Saviour, who would have us come very near to Him, and be most familiar with His brotherly heart.

Supposing this difficulty should be met, still there are tens of thousands who *are very much in doubt concerning their election*. What if they should not be elect, they say? This, of course, results from ignorance, for if they read the Word they would soon discover that all those who believe in Christ may be certain of their election, faith being the public mark of God's privately chosen people. If you make your calling sure you have made your election sure. If you know yourself now to be a lover of God, resting upon the great propitiation which he has set forth for sin, then you may know that this is a work of grace in your soul. God never wrought a work of grace where he had not made an election of grace. That fear, therefore, may be easily driven away, and yet thousands are in bondage to it.

Others are afflicted *with the daily fear that they shall not persevere*. They say, 'After all my professions and prayers, I shall yet be a castaway!' The Apostle Paul was not afflicted with this fear.

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He strove lest this fear should ever come near him. He so lived with holy diligence that he might ever live in a state of blessed assurance, lest after having preached to others he himself should be a castaway, but he could say, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth,' even as Job could, and he could also say, 'I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him until that day.' Still, tens of thousands are subject perpetually to that form of bondage. They cannot reach, in fact, the full assurance of faith. They have scarcely even the glimmering of assurance. They do trust; they trust as the publican did—'standing afar off,' but they have never come yet with John to lean their heads upon the bosom of the Saviour. They are His disciples and His servants, but they can scarcely understand how He can call them His friends, and permit close intercourse with Himself.

Now, beloved, this woman bowed down was very like to these persons for the following reasons:—

Her infirmity much marred her beauty. The beauty and dignity of the human form is to walk erect, to look the sun in the face, and gaze upon the heavens. This woman could do nothing of the kind. She was, no doubt, very conscious of this, and shrank from the public gaze. So unbelief, distrust, mistrust, suspicion—these direful infirmities to which some are subjected, spoil their spiritual beauty. They have the grace of humility. In this they very often excel others, but the other graces,

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the noble graces of faith and holy confidence and courage—these they cannot display. The beauty of their character is marred.

Moreover, this *woman had her enjoyment spoiled*. It must have been a sad thing for her to go about the world bent double! She could not gaze on the beauties of nature as others could, and all her motions must have been, if not painful, yet certainly exceedingly inconvenient. Such is the case with the doubting, distrustful soul under infirmity. He can do but little. Prayer is a painful groaning out of his soul. When he sings it is usually in a deep bass. His harp hangs upon the willows. He feels that he is in Babylon, and cannot sing the song of Zion:—

‘Ah! woe is me,
That I a dweller am
In Kedar’s tents so long!’

Such a psalm as that he might chant, but the bolder and more jubilant notes of Christian psalmody his tongue cannot reach.

This woman, too, *must have been very unfit for active service*. Little of household duty could she perform, and that with pain; and as to public acts of mercy she could take but small part in them, being subject to this constant infirmity. And so with you who are ‘Much-Afraids,’ who are ‘Fear-ings,’ you who have troubled spirits. You cannot lead the van in the day of battle. You can scarcely tell others of the Saviour’s preciousness. You cannot expect to be great reapers in the

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Master's harvest. You have to bide by the stuff, and there is a special law which David made of old concerning those who tarried there. So you do get a blessing, but you miss the higher blessing of noble activity and Christian service.

I might thus enlarge and show the likeness, but I think you can draw the picture for yourselves. You see the woman come into the synagogue, and your pity is at once excited. But if you love the souls of men, and God has made you to be tender as a nursing mother over others, you will pity yet more many of the true seed of Abraham who are bowed down with infirmity.

Now, it appears from our Saviour's words, that *this woman's infirmity was coupled with Satanic influence*. 'Whom Satan hath bound,' saith He, 'lo these eighteen years.' We do not know how much Satan has to do with us. I do know that we do often lay a great deal on his back which he does not deserve, and that we do a thousand evil things ourselves, and then ascribe them to him. Still, there are gracious souls, who do walk in the paths of holiness, who do hate sin, for all that cannot sometimes enjoy peace. We cannot blame them; we must believe that the Satanic spirit is at work, marring their joy and spoiling their comfort. Dr. Watts says:—

'He worries whom he can't devour,
With a malicious joy,'

and doubtless that is true. He knows he cannot

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destroy you because you are in Christ, and therefore if the dog cannot bite he will at least bark. Like Mercy, in 'Pilgrim's Progress,' you will often be alarmed by the evil ones, and all the more so because these evil ones know that in a little while you will be out of gunshot of all the powers of hell, and beyond the hearing of all the bellowings of the fiends of the pit. Satan has much to do with it.

It appears, too, very clearly, from reading the passage, that *the woman's weakness was beyond all human art*. 'She could in no wise lift up herself,' which implies, I think, that she had tried all ways within her reach and knowledge. 'She could in no wise.' Neither by those mechanical operations which have sometimes been found effective in such diseases, nor by those medicines which were much vaunted in that age, could she receive the slightest relief. She had done her best, and physicians had done their worst, and yet, notwithstanding all, she could by no means lift up herself. Truly there are many in this spiritual condition. Have you ever been baffled as a Christian pastor, utterly baffled, in dealing with some cases of spiritual distress? Have you ever gone to pray, feeling the blessedness of prayer all the more because you have proved the futility of your own efforts to comfort a sin-distressed, Satan-tossed spirit? Often has that been my case. There has been the promise to meet the case, but the poor soul could not lay hold of it. There has been the cheering word which has been efficient enough at other times, but it seemed to be

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a dead letter to this poor bondaged spirit. There has been the case in point, and the experience of somebody else just like the case in hand which we tried to tell with sympathy. We tried to work ourselves, as it were, into the position of the candidate with whom we were dealing, but still for all that we seemed to be speaking to the winds, and comforting one who was so inured to sorrow that he felt that for him to cast off the sombre weeds would be a sin, and to cease to mourn would be presumption. Many a time has such a case come before us, and we have thought of this woman, and could only pray that the Master would put His hand upon the person, for our hand and our voice were utterly powerless.

Poor soul, she had been a long time in this case! Eighteen years! Eighteen years! Well, that is not very long if you are in health, and strength, and prosperity. How the years trip along as with wings to their heels! They are scarcely here before they are fled! But eighteen years of infirmity, pain, and constantly increasing weakness! Eighteen years she dragged her chain until the iron entered into her soul. Eighteen years! Two long apprenticeships to sorrow till she had become the acquaintance of grief! Yes, and some such persons, though prisoners of hope, are kept in bondage as long as that. Their disease is like an intermittent fever, which comes on sometimes and then is relieved. They have times when they are at their worst—the ebb-tide; and then they have their

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floods again. Now and then they have a glimpse of summer, and anon the cold chilly winter comes on them apace. Sometimes they half think they have escaped, and leap like the emancipated slave when his fetters are broken, but they have to go back very soon again to the gyves and the manacles, having no permanent relief, being still prisoners year after year. I know I am describing a case which is known to some of you, perhaps I am photographing you yourself.

Yet for all this, *this woman was a daughter of Abraham.* The Lord Jesus knew her pedigree, and assured the ruler of the synagogue of it. She was one of the true seed of Israel notwithstanding all her failings. 'Ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, to be loosed even on the Sabbath day?' demanded the Master. Yes, and you, poor anxious spirit, though your faith be but as a grain of mustard-seed, yet if you have a simple faith in Christ you are safe. You, troubled and tossed one, though your bark seems ready to be swallowed up by the waves, if you have taken Jesus into the vessel you shall come safe to the land. Poor heart, thou mayest be brought very low, but thou shalt never be brought low enough to perish, for underneath thee are the everlasting arms. Like Jonah, thou mayest go to the bottoms of the mountains, and think that the earth with her bars is about thee for ever, but thou shalt yet be brought up, and thou shalt sing Jonah's song—'Salvation is of the Lord!' God does not cast off His people because

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of their dark frames and feelings. He does not love them because of their high enjoyments; neither will He reject them because of their deep depressions. Christian is dear; Father Honest is dear; Valiant-for-Truth, too, is dear to the King of the Pilgrims; but Ready-to-Halt, upon his crutches, is equally dear, and Mr. Fearing and Miss Much-Afraid, though they may lie in Doubting Castle till they are almost starved, shall surely be brought out, for they are the true pilgrims, and shall safely, at length, reach the Celestial City.

II. But we must pass on to our second point—namely, that THE EXAMPLE OF THIS WOMAN IS INSTRUCTIVE TO ALL IN HER CASE.

Observe, *she did not tamely yield to her infirmity without effort.* The expression—‘She could *in no wise* lift up herself’—an old Saxon form of saying: ‘She could in no ways lift up herself’—shows, as I have said before, that she had tried her best. I believe some of you might stand upright if you liked. I am quite certain that in some cases people get into the way of surrendering to depression, until at last they become powerless against it. Some stimulant is given them in the form of a sick husband, or a dying child, and they grow quite cheerful. Under some real trouble they become patient, but when this real trouble is taken away they begin manufacturing troubles of their own. They are never happy, I might almost say, except when they are miserable, and never cheerful except when they

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have something to cast them down. If they have a real trouble they get strength, but at other times they are morbidly troubled in spirit. Now, let us imitate this woman, and shake off our doubts and our unbelief as much as possible. Let us strike up the hymn :—

‘Begone, unbelief, my Saviour is near,
And for my relief will surely appear!
By prayer let me wrestle, and He will perform;
With Christ in the vessel I smile at the storm.’

Let us say with David, ‘Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him!’ Do not so soon yield to the shafts of unbelief. Hold up the shield of faith, and say unto your soul, ‘Nay, as the Lord liveth, Who is the rock of my salvation, my castle and my high tower, my weapon of defence and my glory, I will not yield unto unbelief. Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him, and though all things go against me, yet will I stay myself upon the mighty God of Jacob, and I will not fear!’ The woman, then, had done her best.

Note, next, that although bent double, and therefore having an excellent excuse for stopping at home, *yet she was found at the synagogue*. I believe she was always found there, from the fact that the length of time during which she had been sick was well known—not merely known to Christ because of His Godhead, but known as a matter of common talk and common knowledge in the synagogue. Probably during the whole of the

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eighteen years she had been an attendant there. 'Ah!' she thought, 'if I miss the blessing of health, yet I will not be absent from the place where God's people meet together for worship. I have had sweet enjoyments in the singing of the psalm, and in listening to the devotions, and I will not be away when such grace is being dispensed.'

Oh! mourner, never let Satan prevail upon you to 'forsake the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is.' If you cannot get comfort, still go to the sanctuary. It is the most likely place for you to get it. One of the sweet traits of character in mourners is that they do go to the assemblies of God's people. I knew one aged woman who had year after year been in this state, and after trying long to comfort her, but in vain, I said to her, 'Well, what do you go to the house of prayer for? Why don't you stop at home?' 'Why, that is my only comfort!' said she. 'I thought you told me you were a hypocrite,' I answered, 'and that you had no right to the promises or any of the good things?' 'Ah! but I could not stay away from the place where "my best friends, my kindred, dwell,"' she replied. 'And do you read your Bible? I suppose you have burned that?' 'Burned my Bible!' she said in horror. 'I'd sooner be burned myself!' 'But do you read it? You say there is nothing there for you. If you were to lay hold upon the promises it would be presumption. You are afraid to grasp any single one of the good things of the covenant!' 'Ah! but I could not do without

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reading my Bible ; that is my daily bread ; it is my constant food,' she responded. ' But do you pray ? ' ' Pray ? Oh ! yes ; I shall die praying.' ' But you told me that you had no faith at all, that you are not one of God's people, that you were a deceiver, and I know not what beside.' ' Yes, I am afraid sometimes that I am ; I am afraid now that I am, but as long as I live I'll pray.' All the marks of the child of God were in her private character, and could be seen in her walk and conversation, and yet she always was thus bowed down, and could by no means lift up herself.

I remember a brother-minister who was the means, in God's hands, of comforting a woman when she lay dying who was always in this plight. He said to her, ' Well, Sarah, you tell me you do not love Christ at all ; you are sure you do not ? ' ' Yes, Sir ; I am sure I do not.' He went up to the window, and wrote on a piece of paper, '*I do not love the Lord Jesus Christ.*' ' Now, Sarah,' he said, ' just put your name at the bottom of that.' ' What is it, Sir ; I do not know what it is ? ' When she read it she said, ' No, I'd rather be torn in pieces than I'd put my name to such a thing as that ! ' ' Well,' said he, ' but if it is true you may as well write it as say it,' and this was the means of convincing and persuading her that there really was love to Christ in her soul after all. But in many cases you cannot comfort these poor souls at all. They will still say that they are not the Lord's people, yet they cling still to the means of

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grace, and, by and bye, we trust they will get deliverance.

Another thing observe, that though we are not told it in so many words in the narrative, we may be sure it is true: *When the Lord Jesus called her she came at once.* She was called, and there was no hesitation in her answer. Such speed as she could make in her poor, pitiable plight she made. She did not say, as another said, 'Lord, if you wilt thou canst;' she did not doubt His will. Nor did she imitate another and say, 'If Thou canst do anything to heal me.' She doubted not His power. She said nothing, but we know what she felt. There is not a trace of unbelief; there is every sign of obedience here. Now, soul, when Christ does call thee by His power, make haste to run to Him. When under the preaching of the Word thou feelest as though the iceberg were beginning to melt, do not get away from the sunlight and go back to the old winter gloom. 'Make hay while the sun shines,' says the old proverb. Take care that you do the same. When God gives you a little light, prize it. Thank Him for it, and ask for more. If you have got starlight ask for moonlight. When you have got moonlight do not sit down and weep because it is only moonlight, but ask Him for more, and He will give you sunlight, and when you have got that, be grateful, and He will give you yet more. He will make your day to be as the light of seven days, and the days of your mourning shall be ended. Think much of little mercies since you deserve none.

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Do not throw away these pearls because they are not the greatest that were ever found, but keep them, thank God for them, and then soon He will send you the best treasures from the casket of His grace.

As soon as this woman was healed, she was in another respect an example to us—namely, that *she glorified God*. Her face did it. With what lustre was it lit up! Her whole gait did it. How erect she stood! And then I am sure her tongue did it. The woman might well be pardoned for speaking this once in the midst of the assembly! Restored as she was on a sudden, she could not help but tell out the joy she felt within. The bells of her heart were ringing merry peals; she must give glory to God who had wrought the cure. Some of you profess to have been cured, but have you given glory to God? Why, some of you profess to be Christians, and yet you have never come forward to avow it! You have been afraid to unite yourselves with the Christian Church. Your Master bids you confess Him. The mode of confession which He prescribes is that you be baptized in His name, and yet, though He has saved you, you stand back and are disobedient. Take care! ‘That servant which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.’

I was this week by the bedside of a dying man, an heir of heaven, washed in precious blood, I believe, and rejoicing in it too, but yet he

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could not help saying, 'I ought, years ago, to have taken my stand with God's people. You have often given me many hard blows in the Tabernacle, but never too hard. Tell the people, when you speak to them again, when they know a duty never to postpone it, for that word is true, "That servant that knew his lord's will and did it not shall be beaten with many stripes." I am not condemned; I am not cast away; I am in Christ; I am resting on the precious blood, and I am saved, but though saved I am being chastened.' And so he was sorely chastened with many doubts and fears, and troubles of soul. If you are God's child, any duty neglected will bring upon your soul some chastisement. If you are not God's child you may do very much as you like, and your punishment shall perhaps not come upon you until the next world. But if thou be the King's favourite thou must walk very tenderly, and very attentively, or else as surely as thou art dear to the heart of God, thou shalt feel the rod upon thee to chasten thee and to bring thee back into the path of obedience.

This woman glorified God. Brethren and sisters, can we not do something more to glorify God than we have yet done? If we have done that which seemed to be our duty on such and such occasions, may there not be yet more? There is very much land yet to be possessed for King Jesus. This wicked city is given over to sin, and we are doing so little! Ah! some of you do what you can, but we who do what we can might do more if we had

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more strength with which to do it, and more strength is to be had for the asking. Oh! that we could enlarge our desires for the glory of King Jesus! Oh! to set Him upon a glorious high throne, and to crown Him with many crowns: to prostrate ourselves at His feet, and to bring others to be prostrate at His feet, too, that He might be King in Jeshurun, King of kings and Lord of lords, reigning in our souls for ever and ever. Imitate this woman. If you have been bowed down, and yet restored to comfort, see that, like her, you instantly fall to glorifying God.

III. And this brings us to the last point—THE WOMAN'S CURE IS EXCEEDINGLY INSTRUCTIVE TO PERSONS IN A LIKE CASE.

She went to the synagogue, but she did not get her cure alone by going there. Means and ordinances are nothing in themselves. They are to be used, but they are only dry skin bottles, without water, unless there be something more than these. This woman *met with Christ in the synagogue*, and then came the healing. May we, too, meet with Jesus. That great encounter is possible here, or anywhere, for

‘Where’er we seek Him He is found,
And every place is hallowed ground.’

The great matter is to meet with Him, and if we meet with Him we meet with all we want.

Now, observe, the woman's cure. In the first place, *it was a complete cure*. No part of the

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infirmity remained. She was not left a little crooked, but still much restored. No, she was made straight. When Jesus heals, He heals not by halves. His works of grace may have it said of each one of them, 'It is finished.' Salvation is a finished work throughout.

In the next place, the woman's cure *was a perpetual and permanent one*. She did not return, by-and-bye, by a terrible relapse to her former posture. Once made to walk upright she remained so. When Jesus sheds abroad life, love, and joy in the soul, it is ours for a perpetual inheritance, and we may hold it till we die, nor lose it then.

Notice, too, that the woman *was healed immediately*. That is a point which Luke takes care to mention. The cure did not take days, or weeks, or months, or years, as physicians' cures do, but she was cured immediately. Here is encouragement for you who have been depressed for years. There is yet a possibility that you may be perfectly restored. Yet may the dust be taken from your eyes; yet may your face be anointed with fresh oil; yet may you glow and glisten in the light of Jesus' countenance, while you reflect the light that shines upon you from Him. It may happen to-night; at this moment! Gates may be taken from off their hinges, for the mighty Samson whom we serve can tear up Gaza's gates, posts and bars and all if he wills, to set his captives free. If you be bound by all the fetters that self can forge, yet at one word from Christ, one emancipating word, you shall be

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entirely free. Doubting Castle may be very strong, but he who comes to fight with Giant Despair is stronger still. He who has kept you beneath his power is mighty, but the All-mighty is He Who conquered at Bozrah, and Who will conquer everywhere else when He comes forth for the deliverance of His people. Take down your harps from the willows! Be encouraged. Jesus Christ looseth the prisoners. He is the Lord, the Liberator. He comes to set the captives free, and to glorify Himself in them.

I recall you to the thought with which we commenced this third point—namely, *that the woman's restoration was effected by Jesus Christ—by His laying His hands upon her.* Many of His cures were wrought in this way, by bringing His own personality into contact with human infirmity. 'He put His hand upon her.' Oh! soul, Christ came in human flesh, and that contact with humanity is the source of all salvation. If thou believest in Christ, He comes a second time into contact with thee. Oh! that thy soul might get a touch of Him to-night! He is a man like thyself, though He be 'very God of very God.'

He suffered pangs unutterable. The whole weight of our sin was laid upon Him, till He was bruised as beneath the wheels of the car of vengeance. Beneath the upper and the nether millstone of divine vengeance the Saviour was ground like fine flour. God knows, and God alone knows what agonies He bore. All this was

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substitutionary for sinners. Let not thy sins, then, depress thee. Hadst thou no sin thou wouldest not want a Saviour. Come, with thy sin, and trust in Him. Let not thy weakness distress thee. Hadst thou no weakness thou wouldest not need a mighty Saviour. Come, and take hold upon His strength, for all His strength is meant for the weak, the hopeless, and the helpless. Sitting on the dunghill of thy sin yet trust thou in Jesus, and thou shalt be lifted up to dwell among the princes of the blood-royal. There must be power to save in God when He becomes man to bleed and die. Nothing can be impossible to Him who built the world, and who bears the pillars thereof upon His shoulders, and yet gives His hands to the nails and His heart to the spear. Nothing can be impossible to Immanuel, God with us, when He smarts, and groans, and submits to the bloody sweat, and then empties out His heart's blood that He might redeem men from their iniquities.

‘Oh! come all ye in whom are fixed
The deadly stains of sin!’

Draw near to the Crucified. Let your souls contemplate Christ. Let your faith look to Him. Let your love embrace Him. Cast away all other confidences as mere vanities that will delude you. Away with them! Trust in nothing but the Lord Jesus Christ, His person, His work, His life, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, His glorious pleading before the throne for sinners such as we

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are. Ah! when you come to die, you that are strong and you that are depressed will be very much alike in this matter, that you will have to come back where Wesley was when he said :—

‘Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly.

.

Other refuge have I none;
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee.’

You will come to where Toplady stood when he, too, sang :—

‘Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Thy Cross I cling;
Naked, look to Thee for dress,
Helpless come to Thee for grace:
Black, I to the fountain fly,
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.’

Look to the wounds of Christ; they will heal your wounds. Look to the death of Christ; it will be the death of your doubts. Look to the life of Christ; it shall be the life of your hopes. Look to the glory of Christ; it shall be the glory of your souls here, and the glory of your souls for ever and ever!

May God add His blessing, and bring many of His bondaged ones out of prison. This shall be to His eternal praise.

V

Mercy for the Meanest of the Flock

'In that day saith the Lord will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted.'—MICAH IV. 6.

THIS is spoken, I suppose, in the first place, of the Jewish people, who have been so afflicted on account of their sin that they almost cease to be a nation, and are driven hither and thither among the lands and made to suffer greatly. In the last time when Christ shall appear in His glory in the days of halcyon peace, then shall Israel partake of the universal joy. Poor, limping, faltering Israel, afflicted with tempest, shall yet be gathered and rejoice in her God.

However, I am sure that the text applies to the church of God, and we shall not do amiss if we find in it promises to individual Christians. We will regard the text in those two lights, as spoken to the church and as spoken to individual souls.

I. First, then, AS REFERRING TO THE CHURCH OF GOD, 'In that day will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out and her that I have afflicted.'

Mercy for the Meanest of the Flock

The church of God is not always equally vigorous and prosperous. Sometimes she can run without weariness and walk without fainting, but at other times she begins to limp and halt; there is a deficiency in her faith, a lukewarmness in her love; doctrinal errors spring up, and many things that both weaken and trouble her, and then she becomes like a lame person. And, indeed, beloved, when I compare the church of God at the present moment with the first apostolic church, she may well be called, 'her that halteth.' Oh, how she leaped in the first Pentecostal times! What wondrous strength she had throughout all Judea and all the neighbouring lands! The voice of the church in those days was like the voice of a lion, and the nations heard and trembled. The utmost isles of the sea understood the power of the gospel, and before long the cross of Christ was set up on every shore. Thus was the church in her early days; the love of her espousals was upon her, and her strength was like that of a young unicorn.

How the church halteth now! How deficient in vigour, how weak in her actions! If I compare the church now with the church in Reformed times, when in our own land our fathers went bravely to prison and the stake to bear witness to the Lord Jesus, when, in Covenanting Scotland and Puritan England, the truth was held with firmness and proclaimed with earnestness, and what is, perhaps, better still, when the truth was lived by those who professed it—then was she mighty

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indeed, and not to be compared to 'her that halteth,' as I fear she is now in these days of laxity of doctrine, and laxity of life; when error is tolerated in the church and loose living is tolerated in the world.

I might almost use the same simile for the church to-day, as compared with those early days of Methodism when Whitfield was flying like a seraphim in the midst of heaven, preaching in England and America the unsearchable riches of Christ to tens of thousands, when Wesley and others were working, with undiminished ardour, to reach the poorest of the poor and the lowest of the low. Those were good days with all their faults. Life and fire abounded: the God of Israel was glorified and tens of thousands were converted. The church seemed as though it had risen from the dead and cast off its grave clothes and was rejoicing in newness of life. We are not without hopeful signs to-day. There is not everything to depress but much to encourage. At the same time the church limps: she does not stand firm and fast. Oh, that God would be pleased to visit her.

Moreover, if I look at the text I perceive that the church not only is sometimes weak but, at the same time, or at some other time, *the church is persecuted and made to suffer*, for the text speaks of 'her that is driven out.' And this has often happened; that the church has been driven right out from among men. It has been said of her, 'Away with her from the earth! It is not

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fit that she should live.' But how wondrously God has shown His mercy to His people when they have been driven out. The days of exile have been bright days. The sun never shone more fairly on the church's brow than when she worshipped in the catacombs of Rome, when her disciples wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, tormented, afflicted. In our own country those who met by stealth, perpetually pestered by informers, who would bring them before the magistrates for joining in prayer and song, often said, when they got their liberty, that they wished they had the day again when they were gathered together in the lone house and scarce dared to sing loudly. They had brave times in those days, when every man held his soul in his hand, when he worshipped his God, not knowing whether the hand of the hangman or the headsman might not soon be upon him. The Lord was pleased to bless His people when the church was driven out. If the snowy peaks of Piedmont, if the lowlands of Holland, if the prisons of Spain could speak, they would tell of infinite mercy experienced by the saints under terrible oppression; of hearts that were leaping in heaven, while the bodies were bruised or burning on earth. God has been gracious to His people when they have been driven out.

Sometimes trouble comes to God's people in another way. *The church is afflicted by God Himself.* It seems as if God had put away His church for a time and driven her from His presence.

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That has happened often in all churches. Perhaps some of you are members of such churches now, or have been; discord has come in, and the spirit of peace has gone. Coldness has come into the pulpit and a chill has come over the pews. The prayer meetings are neglected; the seeking of souls is almost given up, the candlestick is there, but the candle seems to be gone, or not to be lighted. Means of grace have become lifeless. You almost dread the Sabbath which once was your comfort. It is wretched for Christian people when it comes to this; and yet in scores of villages and towns in England this is the case. The sheep look up and the shepherd looks down, but there is no food for the sheep, neither does the shepherd himself know where to get the food, because he has not been taught of God. It is a melancholy thing, wherever this has been the case, but I would encourage the saints to cry mightily for the return of God's Spirit, for the restoration of unity and peace, earnestness and prayerfulness, that once again the solitary places of the wilderness may be made glad and the desolate places blossom like the rose.

My brethren, may God never treat the church in England, as she deserves to be treated, for when I look and see around me her sins, they rise up to heaven like a mighty cry. We have been lately told, in so many words, by an eminent preacher, that all creeds have something good in them, even the creed of the heathen and the

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Romanist; and that out of them all the grand creed is to be made, which is yet to be the religion of mankind. God save us from those who talk in this way, and yet profess to be sent of God! They who know in their own souls what God's truth is will not be led astray by such delusions. But yet God may visit His church and chasten her sorely by depriving her of His Spirit for a while. If He has done so, or is about to do so, let us still pray that He may gather her that is driven out and afflicted.

I may not dwell longer upon these points, but hasten to notice the blessing that will come in answer to prayer, upon churches that are weak, or sorely persecuted. There are scattering times, no doubt, but we should always pray that we may live in gathering times, that we may be gathered together in unity, in essential oneness, round the cross, in united action for our glorious Master, and that sinners who are far away may be gathered in, too, and backsliders who have wandered may be restored. Pray for gathering times, brethren, and may the day come when the Lord will assemble her that halteth and will gather her that is driven out.

But you notice that the text speaks of 'a day.' And so we may expect that God will have His own time of benediction. 'In that *day*, saith the Lord, will I assemble her that halteth.' I believe that to be a day in which we enquire after the Lord—a day in which we are prayerful, in which

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we become anxious, in which an agony lays hold upon the souls of believers until the Lord return unto His people; a day when Christ is revealed in the testimony of the church and the gospel is fully preached—in *that* day will the Lord assemble her that halteth. May that day speedily come! But if we do not see the blessing to-morrow, let us recollect that to-morrow may not be God's day. Let us persevere in prayer till God's day does come. There are better days in store for the church, and ere the page of human history closes there will be times of triumph for her in which she shall be glorious, and God be glorified in her.

II. I shall, however, pass from this first point about the church, because I wish to speak to mourners—to melancholy ones. I trust I have a message of mercy to some that are desponding. We shall look on the text, secondly, AS REFERRING TO INDIVIDUAL SOULS. 'In that day, saith the Lord, will I assemble her that halteth.'

I have been thinking why the word 'her' is put in here. Why does the text not refer to 'him'? Surely the blessing is meant for us, the masculine mourners, as well as for the feminine. I suppose that form is used here for these reasons: that the woman is often the weaker of the two, therefore, the weaker sex is here chosen to be the figure of the weaker believer. Moreover our sisters are also the tenderest; they are more sensitive; they suffer often far more acutely than we do; they are tender of spirit, not rough and of a coarse mould

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as men often are. So the Lord looks upon His people in their sensitiveness and He says, 'Poor, tender heart, though thou hast a woman's nature, and art full of proneness to sorrow, I will bless thee in thy weakness and tenderness.' The expression 'her' is, no doubt, meant to set forth also the relationship between the Lord Jesus and His people. He is very fond, both in the prophets and afterwards, of speaking of the church as His bride, His spouse, and of Himself as her husband, and, therefore, since the term is full of love, He here addresses each soul among us, each weak and tried one as though we were His spouse, and speaks of us as 'her.'

But now there are three characters described. Let us find 'her' or 'him' out.

First, *the soul that halteth*. Of course, by that is intended those Christians who are very weak. Some are strong—'Strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.' It would be a great mercy if all God's people were so. But there are some Christians who have faith of but a feeble sort. They have love to God, but they sometimes question whether they do love Him at all. They have piety in their hearts, but it is not of that vigorous kind one would desire. It is rather like the spark in the flax, or the music in the bruised reed. They are of little faith and are much afraid. They are alive, but scarcely alive; sometimes their life seems to tremble in the balance; and yet it is hidden with Christ in God, and, therefore, it is

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really beyond the reach of harm. They are the weak ones. And God speaks to such weak ones, and says, 'I will assemble her that halteth.'

It not only means that they are weak, but that they are slow and halting persons. A lame person cannot travel quickly. And, oh, how slow some Christians are! What little advance they make in the Divine life! They were little children ten years ago, and little children they are now. Their own children have grown up to be men, but they themselves do not appear to have made any advance. They are just babes in grace, and have need of milk still. They are not strong enough to feed upon the strong meat of the kingdom of God. They are slow to believe all that the prophets and apostles have spoken, slow to rejoice in God, slow to catch a truth and perceive its bearing, but slower still to get the nutriment out of it and know its application to themselves. But, slow as they are, I trust we may say of them that they are as sure as they are slow. What steps they do take are well taken, and if they come slowly like the snail, yet they are, like the snail in Noah's days, crawling towards the ark and getting in somehow.

With this slowness there is also pain. A lame man walks painfully. Perhaps every time he puts his foot to the ground, a shock of pain goes through his whole system, and some Christians, in their progress in the heavenly life, seem afflicted in like manner. I meet with some Christians that are very sensitive, and every time there is anything wrong

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they are ashamed and grieved. I wish some other Christians had more of that feeling, for it is an awful fact that many professors seem to tamper greatly with sin, and think nothing of it at all. Better the sensitive soul that is fearful and timorous lest it should in any way grieve the Spirit of God, with a watchful eye over itself, and a conscience that is quick and tender as the apple of the eye, than such presumption and hardness of heart. But some have this sensitiveness without the other qualities which balance it, and it makes their progress to heaven a safe one but a painful one. They do not look enough at the cross. They do not remember that 'if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.' They have not come to see that the Lord Jesus Christ is able to deliver us from all sin, so that indwelling sin shall not have dominion over us, because we are not under the law but under grace. So their progress is painful. But, beloved, the word is for you, 'I will assemble her that halteth; when I call my people together I will call her; when I send an invitation to a feast, I will direct one specially to her. She is weak, she is slow, she is in pain, but for all that I will assemble her.'

The allusion, perhaps, is to a sheep that has been somehow lamed; the shepherd has to get all the flock together and, therefore, he must bring the lame one in too. And so the great, good Shepherd

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of the sheep takes care that the lame sheep shall be gathered. I find that the original word has somewhat of the import of onesidedness; a lame sheep goes as if it went on one side. It cannot use this foot, and so it has to throw its weight on the other side. How many Christians there are that have a onesidedness in religion, and, unfortunately, that often happens to be the gloomy side. They are very properly suspicious of themselves, but they do not add to that a weight of confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ. Looking back upon their past, and seeing their own unfaithfulness, they forget God's faithfulness; looking upon the present they see their own imperfections and infirmities, and forget that the Spirit helpeth our infirmities, that if we had not infirmities there would be nothing for the Spirit to do but to glorify Himself. When they look forward to the future they see the dragons and the dark river of death, but they forget that word, 'I am with thee even to the end.' 'When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee.' What a mercy it is that the Lord will not forget these onesided limpers, but that even they shall be assembled when, with the shepherd's crook, He gathers His flock and brings them home.

We may add to these those who have got tired with the trials of the way. It is a weary thing to be lame. It saddens my heart often to see the sheep go through the London streets; they go limping along, poor things, so spent and spiritless.

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There are many Christians who are like them, they seem to have been so long in trouble that they do not know how to bear up any longer. What with the loss of the husband and the loss of the child, what with poverty and many struggles and no apparent hope of deliverance, what with one sickness and then another in their own person, what with one temptation and then another temptation, and then a third, they feel very tired by the way. They are like Jacob when he halted on his thigh. The blessing is that the Lord says, 'I will assemble her that halteth.' Lay hold on that you halting one. I daresay you suppose you are the last one of the flock. You have got so tired and lame that you think that, though all the others are close by the Shepherd's hand, you are forgotten. You remember that the Amalekites in the wilderness fell upon the children of Israel and smote some of the hindmost of them, and perhaps you are afraid that you will get smitten in that way. Let me remind you of a text. 'The Lord shall go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rearward.' Now those that lead the way can rejoice that God goes before them, but you can rejoice that God is behind you, as we read again, 'The glory of the Lord shall be thy rearward.' He will take care that you shall not be destroyed.

'Weak as you are, you shall not faint,
Or fainting, shall not die;
Jesus, the strength of every saint,
Will aid you from on high.'

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He will assemble her that halteth. Does not that suit some of you? If the cordial meets your disease take it, and may the Lord bless it to you.

But now, secondly, *the soul that is exiled*. 'I will gather her that is driven out.' Perhaps I address someone here who has been driven out from the world. It was not a very great world, that world of yours, but still it was very dear to you. You loved father, mother, brothers and sisters; but you are a speckled bird among them now. Sovereign grace and electing love have lighted on you, but not on them. At first they ridiculed you, when you went to hear the gospel, but now that you have received it, and they perceive that you are in earnest, they persecute you. You are one by yourself. You almost wish you did not live among them, because you are farther off from them than if you were really away from them. Nothing you can do pleases them. There are sure to be a thousand faults, and they fling the taunt at you when you fail and say, 'This is your religion!' You cry out, 'Woe is me that I in Meshech am a dweller so long.' Do you recollect what became of the man when the Pharisees cast him out? Why, the Lord met him and graciously took him in. The Lord loves His people more when the world hates them, for, 'If ye were of the world, the world would love his own, but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.' When I go to a man's house

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and his dog barks at me, he does it because I am a stranger, and when you go into the world, and the world howls at you, it is because you are different from them, and they recognise in you the grace of God, and pay the only homage which evil is ever likely to pay to goodness, namely, persecute it with all their might.

Perhaps, however, it is worse than that. 'I should not mind being driven out from the world,' say you, 'I could take that cheerfully, but I seem driven out from the church of God.' There may be two ways in which this may come about. Perhaps you have been zealous for the Lord God of Israel, in the midst of a cold church, and you have spoken, perhaps not always prudently; the consequence is, that you have angered and vexed the brethren, and they have thought that you fancied yourself to be better than they, though such a thought was far from your mind. It is an unfortunate thing for a man to be born before his time, and yet he may be a grand man. Some Christians in certain churches seem to live ahead of their brethren. It is a good thing, but as surely as Joseph brought down the enmity of his own brethren upon himself, because he walked with God, and God revealed Himself to him, so is it likely that you, if you are in advance of your brethren, will draw down opposition upon yourself, which will be very bitter. Never mind, if the servants repulse you; go and tell their Master, do not go about and grumble at them. Pray their Master to mend their manners.

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He knows how to do it. But it is just possible that you have been driven out only in your own thoughts. Perhaps the members of the church really love you and esteem you, and think highly of you; but you have become so depressed in spirit, that you do not feel that you have any right to be in the church. You have made up your mind that you will not be a hypocrite, and, therefore, you have given up all profession. You have a notion that some of your fellow-members think evil of you, and wonder how ever such an one as you can come to the church. Oh, the many poor little lambs that come bleating round me with their troubles! And when I tell them, 'I never heard anything against you in my life, I never heard anybody speak of you but with love and respect, I never observed anything in you but tenderness of conscience and a quiet, holy walk with God,' they seem quite surprised.

Brethren, look after your fellow members; do not let them think you are cold to them. Some of them will think it whatever you may do. Some of you brethren are taken to be so proud that you will not look at people; if they did but know the truth they would see you were very different. Now, you lambs, do not be grieved about nothing. But you who are stronger than they, mind you do not give any offence that can be prevented. 'It must needs be that offences come, but woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh.' Let us be careful not to break the bruised reed, even by

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accidentally treading upon it. But, dear brother or sister, if that is your condition, let me tell you that you are not driven out—it is a mistake. But if you think so, go to your Lord. If you will tell Jesus, He will make up for any apparent change that may come over His people.

Ah, but I think I hear one say, 'It is not being driven out from the world that hurts me, nor being driven out from the church; I could bear that, but I am driven out from the Lord Himself. I seem to have lost His company, and losing that I have lost all.

'What peaceful hours I once enjoyed,
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void,
The world can never fill.'

Thank God if you feel like that! If the world could fill your heart it would prove that you are no child of God, but if the world cannot fill it, then Christ will come and fill it. If you will be satisfied with nothing but Himself, He will satisfy you. If you are saying, 'I will not be comforted till Jesus comforts me,' you shall get the comfort. He never did leave a soul to perish that was looking to Him and longing for Him. Cry to Him again, and this text shall be true, 'I will gather her that is driven out.' May that word come home to some of you! I do not know where you may be but the Master does, may He apply the words to your hearts.

One other person is mentioned here, *the soul*

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that is troubled, 'her that I have afflicted.' Yes, and in all churches of God there are some dear, good friends that are more afflicted than others. They are often the best people. Are you surprised at that? Which vine does the gardener trim the most? That which bears the most and the sweetest fruit. He uses the knife most upon that because it will pay for pruning. Some of us seem scarcely to pay for pruning; we enjoy good health, but when trial comes, when the Lord prunes us, we may say, 'Thank God, He means to do something with me after all.'

Perhaps this afflicted one is afflicted in body—scarcely a day without pain, scarcely a day without the prospect of more suffering. Well, if there is any child the mother is sure to remember it is the sick one, and if there are any Christians to whom God is peculiarly familiar they are His afflicted ones. I have read concerning the poor, 'Thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.' I take that as regarding sick saints. The Lord make your bed, dear brethren and sisters, if you are suffering bodily pain!

Some are mentally afflicted. Much of the doubting and fearing we hear about comes from some degree of mental aberration. The mental trouble may be very slight, but it is very common. I suppose that there is not a perfectly sane man among us. When that great wind blew, about the time of the Fall, a slate blew off everybody's house, and some are more touched than

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others, so that they look at black things, and take the black view of all things. This mental infirmity, which they are not to be blamed for, will be with them till they get to heaven. Well, God blesses those who are thus troubled.

Then some are spiritually afflicted. Satan is permitted to try them very much. There is only one way to heaven, but I find that there is a bit of the road newly stoned, a harder path to travel on, and some persons seem to go to heaven all over the new stones; their soul is perpetually exercised, while God grants to other to choose the smoother parts of the way and go triumphantly on. Let those I have spoken of hear the word of promise, 'I will gather her that I have afflicted,' for when God Himself gives the affliction, He will bring His servant through and glorify Himself thereby.

To close, let us notice this, 'I will gather her,' as if He said, 'I will gather My tried ones—into the fellowship of the church, I will bring My scattered sheep near to Me.' The Lord Jesus will gather His dear people to Himself, and into fellowship with Himself. 'I will gather them every day around My mercy-seat. I will gather them, by-and-by, on the other side of Jordan, on those verdant hill tops, where the Lamb shall for ever feed His people, and lead them to living fountains of waters.' Poor, tried, halt, afflicted, limping soul, the Shepherd has not forgotten you. He will gather all the sheep and they shall 'pass again under the

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hands of Him that telleth them'; there shall not be one missing. I cannot make out how some of my brethren think that the Lord will lose some of His people; that there are some whom Jesus has bought with His blood, who will get lost on the way! It is an unhappy shepherd that finds some of his lambs devoured by the wolf, but our Shepherd will never be in that strait with His sheep. 'I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.' What say you to that, you halting ones? What say you to that, you, the hindmost of all? He has given eternal life to you as much as to the strongest of the flock, and you shall never perish, neither shall any pluck you out of His hand. He will gather you with the rest of them.

And when will He fulfil that promise, beloved? He is always fulfilling it, and He will completely fulfil it the day when He is manifested. As this chapter describes Him when He comes to make peace, and men beat their swords into ploughshares, then will He gather you.

Even now, when He comes as the great Peace-giver, in that day He gathers her that halts. When the storms of temptation lie still awhile, and He shows Himself in the heart as the God that walked the sea of Galilee of old, then are His people gathered into peace; they rest in that day. Thank God the most tried and troubled believer has some gleams of sunlight. In winter time sometimes, you know, there comes a day which

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looks like a summer's day, when the gnats come out and think it is the spring, and the birds begin to sing as if they thought that surely the winter was over and past. And in the darkest experience there are always some blessed gleams of light, just enough to keep the soul alive. That is the fulfilment of the promise in one measure. 'I will assemble her that halteth.' 'In that day.'

But the day is coming, the day is coming, when you and I who have been halting and feeble and weak shall be gathered never to halt, never to doubt, and never to sin again. I do not know how long it may be. Some of you are a long way ahead of me, according to your years, but we cannot tell. The youngest of us may go soonest, for there are last that shall be first, and first that shall be last. But there is such a day written in the eternal decrees of God, when we shall lay aside every tendency to sin, every tendency to doubt, every capacity for tribulation, every need for chastisement, and then we shall mount and soar away to the bright world of endless day. What a mercy it will be to find ourselves there! Oh, how we shall greet Jesus with joy and gladness, and tell of redeeming grace and dying love that brought home even the halting ones and the weakest and the feeblest.

Do you know, I think those that are reckoned strong, and do the most for God, are generally those who think themselves weakest when it comes to the stripping time. I read of a

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man who had been the means of the conversion of many hundreds of souls by personal private exertion—I refer to Harlan Page. On his dying bed he said, ‘They talk of me; but I am nothing, nothing, nothing.’ He mourned his past life, to him it seemed that he had done nothing for his Master, that his life was a blank. He wept to think he had done so little for Christ, while everyone was wondering how he had lived such a blessed and holy life. That man only is rich towards God that begins to know his emptiness and feels that he is less than nothing and vanity.

Beloved, it is because those who serve God best often feel that they are halt, and driven away, and afflicted, and tossed with doubts and fears; it is because of this, that this promise is put to the lowest case, and the blessing given to the very meanest capacity. It is so in order that those who are strong may yet be able to come in, and when in depression of spirit say, ‘That promise will suit me, I will get a grip of it. I will come to God with it in my hand, and at the mercy-seat get it fulfilled to me, even to me.’ ‘I will assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out and her that I have afflicted.’ The Lord grant you, beloved, to be numbered amongst His jewels in that day.

Oh, what shall I say to those, who know nothing about the Divine life at all, who, perhaps, are considering, ‘Well, I never get halting or doubting. I have a merry time of it.’ Yes, and so does the

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butterfly, while the summer lasts ; but the winter kills it. Your summer may last a little while, but the chill of death will soon be on you, and then what is there for you but hopeless misery for ever and for ever? God give you grace to fly to Jesus now and be saved with an everlasting salvation, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

VI

Secret Disciples Encouraged

‘Art not thou also one of His disciples?’—JOHN xviii. 25.

BLESSED be His name there are some of us who count it our highest joy to answer to this question, ‘Yes.’ Whatever may be entailed by the confession we shall be glad to endure, but we could not do otherwise than say, ‘He owned us of old, and He is not ashamed to call us brethren; wherefore also we are not ashamed of Him, but we call Him Master and Lord.’ In an interview I had about a fortnight ago with a dear and venerable friend who is just upon the borders of the grave, he said to me, ‘There is a verse in the hymn-book which I know you do not like, sir, and which I do not like, though both of us have sometimes been obliged to sing it:—

‘’Tis a point I long to know;
Oft it causes anxious thought:
Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I His, or am I not?’

‘But I have no doubt about it,’ he went on to say,

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'any more than I have about my own existence. Let others doubt it if they like. I *know* I love the Lord, I am sure I do. If there is anything in all this world that is beyond a question to me it is that I do love Him with all my heart and soul and strength.' Now, that ought to be the condition of every Christian. There ought to be no question here. We should be able to reply at once, when asked, 'Art not thou also one of His disciples?' 'I am: I count it my honour, my joy, that He permits me to sit at His feet and to be instructed by Him, and to go forth into the world bearing His reproach.' But at the same time, dear friends, there are some in the world who could not go that length, of whom, nevertheless, we have the hopeful belief that they are His disciples. Their conduct is not that of bold confessors; they are rather like Nicodemus who came to Jesus by night; like Joseph of Arimathæa they are disciples, but secretly, for fear. We hope, however, that they are true disciples, and that by-and-by will be avowed disciples.

I thought of speaking a little to such persons. This, perhaps, will be unfortunate for most of you, for I shall not be addressing many, perhaps, here present. Still, if there are but a few such, we must look after the one at the risk even of leaving the ninety and nine. So I address myself to those whom we assuredly suspect to be followers of Jesus, concerning whose faith we want to have a little better evidence, and whose life we would

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see a little more consistent with their being truly His followers.

I. First, then, I would ask, WHY ARE YOU SUSPECTED OF BEING A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST? Now, please to observe the reasons why Simon Peter was suspected, for the same reasons may be applicable to you.

He was suspected of being a disciple of Christ by some, *because he had been seen with the disciples*. One of the people said, 'Did I not see thee in the garden with Him?' Now, there are those of you who are always seen in the house of God, not only at stated services which are common to the general public, but you are seen at the prayer-meeting; you are seen at times when the interest is more spiritual, and when only the spiritual, it would be supposed, would be attracted and find anything that would interest them. There are you discovered. It is not only in the house of God that you are seen with Christ's people, but out-of-doors, too. You do not enjoy frivolous society; you are not at home in the haunts of vanity; your companions are the godly, you delight in their conversation, and the more spiritual the conversation becomes the more you enjoy it. Now, I do not know that you are a follower of Christ, but I have a strong suspicion you may be, and I should like to put the question to you, if I might, 'Art not thou also one of His disciples? Did I not see thee in the garden with Him?' Wherefore dost thou keep such company and love such society if thou art not

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one of them? Is not the old proverb true, 'Birds of a feather flock together?' How is it thou lovest the footsteps of the flock and the way of the shepherds' tents, if thou art not one of them? I dare not say thou art, for I cannot read thy heart; but I will venture to put the question, 'Art not thou also one of His disciples?'

They suspected him, again, *because of his conversation*. Peter did not want to be known, and therefore I do not suppose that he said anything voluntarily that would betray him. I daresay if he conversed at all at the fire he kept clear of all topics and subjects that would reveal him, or lead to the question being put as to whether he was a disciple or not; but somehow or other whatever he talked about there was a sort of brogue, a twang in his speech, a something which showed that at any rate he was a Galilean, and they began to suspect that he might also be a companion of Jesus of Nazareth. It was his talk that betrayed him. Now, I do not know, dear friend, whether thou art a disciple of Christ, and I do not propose to press thee, but excuse my putting the question. Your language and accent have about them a seasoning and a flavour of Christianity. You earnestly put aside from your speech everything unclean, and you delight to speak words that honour Christ. If at any time in conversation there is a word said that seems to reflect upon the Lord, you are grieved with it, and you would not repeat any sentiment or sentence that would dishonour Him. You are

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cautious and careful, too, about truth in your speech. You desire also to speak to the good of others. Specially during the last few months you have been very particular, and your prayer has been, 'Open Thou my lips.' You have been afraid of speaking those idle words for which God will bring men into judgment.

Now, I do not know that you are His disciple, but I suspect it, for a man is judged by his speech. We generally know what is in the well by what comes up in the bucket; and the metal of a bell can be pretty well judged by the stroke of the clapper. I think we can form some estimate of who you must be when we perceive in your conversation the tone of a Christian, when we hear that you speak as one does whose heart has been renewed by Divine grace. I shall put the question, therefore, to you, expecting a good answer, 'Art not thou also one of His disciples?'

Further than this. Peter was recognized, I suspect, *as having acted for his Lord*, for the person who said, 'Did I not see thee in the garden with Him?' was a relative of him whose ear Peter had cut off. As for you, it is not long since you were angry when someone had blasphemed or spoken a hard word against one of God's servants, or against God's gospel. I am not sure you did well to be angry, but at any rate it was a holy zeal that made you angry. Why, you were quite red in the face as you defended the truth. I say, I am not sure you did

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well to be angry, but at any rate, while you were cutting off that fellow's ear with that sword of yours, and dealing out such hard strokes for Christ, if I had been there to see you I should have thought that you were one of His disciples, even though I should have known that your Master would not have wished you to use the sword or to be so violent as you were. Yet your very zeal for Him, though perhaps it was indiscreet, perhaps not altogether what He would approve, showed that you really had some love to Him, some seeking after Him, some zeal for His glory. Is not it so? Surely thou also art one of His disciples. These things led them to suspect Peter, and these things lead us to suspect you.

One other thing, I doubt not, there was about Peter as he stood warming his hands by the fire. *He was specially interested in the fate of Jesus.* Alas for him, he had so far forgotten himself that he tried, perhaps, to avoid showing that he took any particular interest in the trial; but I will warrant you those that could read faces could read something in Peter's face as it was lit up by the glare of the coals. When he heard them smite his Master with the palms of their hands upon His cheek, did not you see that tear go down his face? He pretended he was brushing away a drop of sweat from his brow; but anyone who was watching him, especially one with the quick eyes of the maid that spoke, could see that it was a dewdrop of another sort which was falling from his eye. And

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when Christ was accused and replied so mildly, or else replied not at all, you could see a twitching about Peter's mouth. He did not know how to bear it. There was a contention going on with his spirit. He loved his Master: how could he do otherwise? But he was afraid of men, and his face must have looked as though agitated by contending storms, as the deep emotions went sweeping over his soul. Those that watched him saw it, though he was not aware of their keen gaze.

Now you have not said you are a disciple of Christ, but have not we caught you sometimes and read it in your face? The other Sunday when we spoke of the Redeemer's sufferings your soul melted; when we talked of His glories we could see how you exulted in the theme, and when the gospel was preached freely to the chief of sinners, why, your eyes looked somehow as if you understood it, and as if you loved it. Though, perhaps, even now, you would hardly venture to say, 'I am saved,' yet you experience a joy and delight in hearing the truth, which you would not have known if you had not been one of His, and a holy trembling and heart-searching under the Word of God that you would not have experienced unless you had been first of all quickened by the Spirit of His grace. Yes, the countenance will often betray what is going on within; and those dear ones who are looking with anxiety upon you, anxious to know whether you are saved—I have no doubt they have observed about you a great many things that have compelled

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them cheerfully to say, 'We believe So-and-so is a Christian. We cannot doubt it. There is a something about his whole mien and conversation, his manner of speech, his mode of thought, and style of action, that betrays him as being a disciple of Christ.'

Now, beloved friend, I cannot follow you home and judge of your secret life ; but I will put this question to you in various ways, in which, of course, I must leave Simon Peter out of the question. You have lately put your trust in Christ Jesus alone ; that is to say, if you have not done so, or if you are not sure you have done so, at any rate you have not any other trust, and all the trust you have got is set on Him. You do see that there is an end of all perfection in the flesh, and you are looking for the perfection which He gave to His people when He finished His sacrifice and sat down at the right hand of God. Though you cannot see much light, yet you do know there is no light except in Him, and you have done with that false light that you once rejoiced in. Well, I am glad, and I am inclined to put to you the question, 'Art not thou also one of His disciples?'

Why, you have lately began to pray, and that not as a matter of form. You have left off that form you once repeated, and now you pray from the very heart. Sometimes you cannot pray as you would ; in fact, you never do make your petition quite as you desire. Still, you pray as you can, with groans and tears and longings that you may be taught how

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to pray better. Well, I never heard yet of a praying soul that was not one of His disciples. It was a token that Saul, of Tarsus, was a convert to Christ when it was said, 'Behold, he prayeth.' And so I will put to you the question, since you utter the living prayer of a truly earnest soul, 'Art not thou also, despite of thy doubts and questionings and humble lamentations—art thou not also one of His disciples?'

Moreover, now thou hast an interest in the Word of God. The Book was very dull to thee once, a three-volume novel pleased thee much better. Now, anything that will tell thee of thy Lord and of His love, and will instruct thee in His truth—anything of that sort thou carest for; thou hast a hungering after it. Well, I have not known dead people become hungry yet; and I do not know that I ever heard yet of a carrion crow that desired to feed on the food of the dove. I think there must be some change in thee, or thou wouldest not love the clean winnowed grain which God's children delight in. I am not sure about it; still I shall venture to put the question, and believe that I know what answer thou wilt give, 'Art not thou also one of His disciples?'

Besides, you know there is a change in your life. As a child, you are now striving to honour your parents. As a tradesman, you now have left off many practices in trade that once you allowed to yourself. As a common man speaking to others you are now more charitable in your words than you

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used to be. There are things that were once amusements, which yielded you pleasure, which have now become vanity of vanities to you. Now you know that when you rise in the morning the thing you are most afraid of is that you should do wrong during the day, and if you are troubled at night it is because you have done a wrong, and the matter that pains you about it most is not the loss of custom, but the loss of a peaceful conscience.

Now, methinks if thou art all this, surely thou also art one of His disciples. If thou art not wholly looking to Him for salvation, and yet there is such a change of life in thee as this, surely thou also art one of them. But it is not mine to answer the question; it is mine to put it. One thing I will say, however, in putting it: either you are His disciple or you are not; that is certain. There are no betweenites, no neutrals. 'He that is not with Me is against Me.' If you are not Christ's disciple you are assuredly a stranger from the commonwealth of Israel, and a man unreconciled to God. Which, then, are you? Art not thou also one of His disciples?

I have suggested many hopeful things that would lead me to think that you are His disciple; but if you are not, then assuredly you are His enemy. What think you of that? If I should make a list of this congregation, and should write down all the disciples of Christ (supposing I were able to do that), and if my pen were just about to be withdrawn from the paper, could you bear that I should say, 'I

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am about to close this roll: I have written down all the disciples of Christ here: I have finished the list and your name is not there?' I am sure you would say, 'Oh, stay your hand awhile, sir. I was afraid I was not one of His, but now it comes to the push I dare not withhold my name.' And I am certain that if I were then to take another roll and begin to write down the names of all those who did not believe in Jesus, those who remained His enemies; if I began to put your name down you would say, 'Oh, no; do not that. Stop a moment. Do not let it be written. I could not stand that, for I think I am not quite His enemy, surely. At any rate, I long to be His disciple.'

I wish sometimes you would push yourself into this corner. If it came to the point, beloved—if it really came to the point—some of you who have said, 'I am afraid I do not love Him,' because you do not love Him as you ought; some of you have said, 'I am afraid I do not trust Him,' because you have some doubts and some fears, I have not any doubt that God would lead you, if it came to the point, notwithstanding all things, to trust Him and to rejoice in Him. Remember one of the martyrs who had been condemned to die for Christ, and who about a week before he died was full of great fear and trembling. He was afraid of the fire, and much cast down. There was a fellow prisoner with him who scolded him for it, and told him that he ought to trust in God, that he ought not to be dismayed, and ought not to be cast down.

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When the day came for them to burn together, the poor, weak, trembling man stood on the faggot, and he said, before the fire was kindled, 'Oh! He has come; He has come; He has come; and He has filled my soul with His presence.' He died triumphantly, while the other man who had scolded him for his want of faith recanted at the last moment, and became a traitor to his cause. The Lord will help you if you are but right toward Him. Still, I pray that you may be delivered from every question about whether you are His disciple or not.

II. Now, having thus uttered my suspicions about some of you, I shall in the second place demand from those of you who seem to be Christ's disciples, WHY YOU DO NOT ACT IN CONSISTENCY THEREWITH. 'Art not thou also one of His disciples?'

Why, then, are you not sharing His reproach? Peter is standing there warming his hands, looking to his personal comfort. His Master is over yonder being despised and rejected, maltreated and smitten in the face. If thou art one of His disciples, is this the place for thee, Peter, amongst the ribald crowd around the fire? Is not thy proper place at thy Lord's side? to be laughed at as He is, falsely accused as He is, and buffeted as He is? So then I may be speaking to some who do love Christ as I have said, or are to be suspected of it, but they have never borne His reproach yet. Your name is not numbered with any Christian church because—well, it is not a very respectable thing in the circle in

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which you move. You have not professed that truth which you believed, because it would render you extremely unpopular if you did. You have not said in your household, 'I am a Christian,' because it is clear to you that your husband might not like it, or that your father might not have patience with it. You have slunk into the workshop, and you have hid your colours, and you have been comfortable with ungodly men. And when they have uttered hard things about Christ you have not liked what they said, but you have not uttered your disapproval. You chimed in with the ungodly. Your silence gave consent to them.

'Art not thou also one of His disciples,' and dost thou refuse the reproach of Christ? Hast thou forgotten Moses who, though he might have been like a king in Egypt, yet took his place with the poor, despised, enslaved Israelites, 'esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt?' Can you not take your place with Christ's poor people? Are you ashamed of them because they are not titled and rich, or because their literary standing is not very high? Are you ashamed of them because other people misrepresent and slander them? Has the offence of the cross ceased? Do you expect that true Christianity ever will be fashionable? Do you believe for a moment, in your heart, that Christ spoke a lie when He said, 'Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves?' If there be a religion concerning which all men speak well, woe unto it, for it cannot be the

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religion of Christ. Do you not know that the way to heaven is up stream? The current runs downward to the gulf of destruction. Are you not willing to take the cross and to go against common opinion and against everything else that is necessary for Christ's sake?

The day cometh when they that have been ashamed of His cross will find themselves losing His crown. 'No cross, no crown.' 'Ye that have been with Me in this evil generation shall be with Me when I shall come in the glory of My Father.' That, virtually, is Christ's word to His people. 'Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed; but whosoever shall confess Me before men him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven.' If you dare not follow Him because you fear shame, shame shall be your perpetual inheritance. Remember that verse, 'But the fearful and the unbelieving shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire.' Oh! that we may never be among those cowards, for those are the persons He means, not the fearing ones, but the fearful ones, who dare not be reproached for Him. Is there listening to these words one that loves his Lord, and knows the truth, and knows where God's church is, and yet has been afraid to join His people—ashamed to confess the truth and to follow Christ? I come to thee with this word, and fain would I look thee in the face, and say, 'Art not thou also one of His disciples?'

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Yet thou goest in and out with the ungodly, and thou warmest thy hands at their fire, and thou art mirthful with their jollity, and thou art pleased with their ungodliness. Oh! come now! Come thou out from this. 'Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing.' Confess Christ that He may confess you.

Again. If you are among Christ's disciples, *why are you not witnessing for Him?* It was not only that Peter was not sharing His shame, but that when Christ was on His trial it was due to Him that every person who could have spoken a good word for Him should do it, but everyone was silent. When Christ said, 'I spake openly,' might not Peter have said, 'Yes, I have heard all He said. I have never heard Him utter sedition or blasphemy. Nothing of the kind has ever come from my Master's lips. If anything has been spoken in secret I have been there; I have been with John and James in the most select circle of all His disciples; and thus, too, I can bear witness that He is innocent.' But, no; Peter is silent, and instead of witnessing he denies his Master.

It is the duty of every Christian to be witnessing for Christ. Still every day is Jesus on His trial. He stands before the world, as it were, at this very hour, and the question is—Is He the Son of God or not? Witnesses are being examined every day for Him and against Him. 'What think ye of Christ?' is a question which is stirring all the city

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and all lands, more or less ; and now shall He who is the claimant of the royal crown—who claims to be the Saviour of men and the Head of the Church—shall He, while so many speak against Him, lack the evidence of any one who knows Him, who has been with Him and loves Him? Oh! there are some of us that find it sweet to witness to Him that He is the very Christ, and we do not take any honour to ourselves for so doing, for flesh and blood has not revealed it unto us.

But is anyone keeping back his testimony? 'Why,' saith one, 'what would my testimony be worth?' Thou dost not know. 'Nobody would notice me. I am only a humble woman in my family.' What! and hast thou not some desire that thy family should know the truth. Hast thou one little child on thy knee, and hast thou never put thy arms about that little one's neck and prayed that she might belong to Jesus, or that the boy might be the Saviour's? Hast thou never told those darlings of thine what Christ has done for thee? Thou couldst not do it, dost thou say? Not talk to thine own child of what is written in thine own heart concerning thine own Lord? Ah! if thou canst not, cry to God against such a disability, and be not satisfied till thou hast conquered thy unholy shame, for unholy it is. If thou also art one of His disciples bear Thy witness, even if it be but one that can hear it. If that be all the congregation that God sendeth thee thou hast done thy part. I am not accountable for the people that hear, but

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only for the witness that I bear. You shall not be accountable for the largeness or smallness of your sphere, but for the faithfulness of your testimony to Christ. Tell all with whom you come in contact that He is your Saviour, a precious Saviour, a true Promiser, a Promise-keeper, a faithful Friend, a Helper in life and in death; and, I say again, thou knowest not what may be the value of thy testimony, for if it be borne but to a child, that child may grow up to bear testimony to tens of thousands. Thou knowest not what may come of a spark of fire. Do but let it drop, and thou mayest set half a continent of a blaze therewith. 'Art not thou also one of His disciples?' If thou art, then bear thy witness as well as take up thy cross.

Now, diverging a little from what some of you will think most practical, let me say, 'Art not thou also one of His disciples?' then *why art thou not enjoying the privileges which belong to His disciples?* You have not been baptized; yet He who said 'Believe,' said also 'Be baptized.' It is written of some, 'These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.' I will ask thee, did not the Lamb go down into the Jordan? Was He not baptized? Hast thou followed Him whithersoever He goeth? If thou hast not so done, in being disobedient to His will thou hast lost a privilege. There is His Supper, too. 'Tis but an outward form as the other is; both are but emblems; but still the Lord has been pleased to

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say, 'This do in remembrance of Me;' and He often gives to His people in the breaking of bread very sweet manifestations of Himself. Thou art one of His disciples, or at least I suspect thee; but thou hast never been to the Lord's table. 'There are others that can observe those things,' you say. Stay. Suppose it be right for any one Christian to neglect the ordinances of God's house, clearly there can be no exceptional privileges; it would, therefore, be right for all Christians to neglect these two ordinances. You are not a member of any Christian church, but you think you are right in standing alone. If you are, so would all be; and clearly the visible church would become extinct. But it could never have been the Lord's intention that it should be so. He has not ordained that His people should live as individuals alone. He calls Himself a Shepherd, because sheep are gregarious. They flock together, and they make a flock and a fold, and He would have His people so. If He had called them by the name of some other creature it might be supposed that they would go to heaven separately and alone; but He puts them as a flock, and that signifies fellowship—union.

Are you right there? Are you sure? If you are right, then we should all be right in doing as you do; and where and how could the means of grace be maintained? Would not almost the very preaching of the gospel become extinct, for the church of God is 'the pillar and ground of the truth,' by which is meant, I suppose, that as in the

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Roman forum there were certain pillars upon which the decrees of the Senate were put up, so the church is a pillar upon which God hangs up the gospel, and its proclamation of the gospel to the sons of men is the pillar and ground upon which God exhibits the gospel to all onlookers. And truly it must be so. The church's business it is to evangelize—the church's business it is to maintain ordinances; but where would be the church to do this if all Christians were to be allowed to remain separate from the church? Your business is to find some company of believers, unite yourself with them, and enjoy the church privileges which Christ has given, such as His two ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper, and all the other blessings which belong to the church as constituted in His name. 'Art not thou also one of His disciples?' His disciples meet to remember Him and you turn your back. They gather to the table, feeding upon the bread and wine which are emblems of Him, you go away, and seem to say, 'We do not want these. Christ has instituted an ordinance we do not require. We can do without it. We are so spiritual we do not need it.' O sirs, say not so. If thou be one of His disciples, do as He bids thee.

But now a more cheering thought with which to close. 'Art not thou also one of His disciples?' *Then why art thou not resting in His love, in His grace, and in His power?* You came in here to-night with a burden upon your spirit which is crushing you into the very dust. You are low and

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depressed and miserable, and people in the house know it, and yet they know that you are a professed Christian. 'Art not thou also one of His disciples?' and did He not say, 'Behold the fowls of the air: they sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Therefore, take no thought saying What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? Thou also art one of His disciples, and yet thou art vexing thyself with cares and troubles just like a heathen man and a publican. Oh! but thou hast lost a friend, a child, a husband, or a father, and thou art crushed into the very dust; thou hast no hope now, and thou art angry with thy God, and yet Christ said, 'Not as I will, but as Thou wilt.' Art not thou also one of His disciples? Is this like thy Master. He drank the gall cup, and thou dost put it away and fight against thy God. How can it be? 'But I am afraid of an evil that is coming upon me,' you say. Hath He not said, 'Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.' Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things, and you are one of His disciples, and yet you are fearing for the future. O friend, O friend! Doth this become thee? Is this right? I have come just now from the bedside of a dearly-

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beloved friend to whom I have already referred. Strange as it is, he has been unconscious two days to everybody else, but the moment he hears my voice he opens his eyes, and says, 'Oh! how happy am I to see your face once again, my dear pastor!' and then he begins to pour out a blessed torrent of adoration and praise to his God. Only just alive he says he is, and yet he is the happiest man alive, he says, and Christ is more precious than ever. He is sinking gently away rejoicing. He says he is as happy as ever he was in his life, and, he thinks, more happy, though the gurgle is in his throat, and he can scarcely breathe. And you are afraid to die, are you? You are a disciple of that blessed Lord who is helping our dear brother to die; and you think he will not help you, too? Why, thousands of His people have closed their eyes on earth, but to open them in heaven; thousands have died triumphantly; thousands have passed through the river of death sweetly and calmly rejoicing in Him. And you also are one of the disciples of the same Master—the same Master who can

'make a dying bed,
Feel soft as downy pillows are,'

—the same Master who has said, 'Fear not, I am with thee: be not dismayed, I am thy God;' and yet you cannot trust Him who has been so faithful to others—ay, and let me say, who has been so faithful to you up till now. Oh! if you be indeed His disciple, go and put that aching head of yours

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right on the bosom of your Lord, for within that bosom palpitates a heart that never changes and that never fails one of His disciples. Go and rest there. Thou mayest rest, for it is well, it must be well with thee for the present, for the future, for time, for eternity. If thou art one of His disciples take His yoke upon you, and learn of Him, like Him be meek and lowly of heart, and thou shalt find rest unto thy soul. Remember, thy place is not to question what God doth, nor to arraign Him at thy bar. Thy duty is not to say, 'My will be done,' but 'it is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord.' Thy Lord was patient, submissive, acquiescent in the Father's will; and thou His disciple—I was about to say thou oughtest to be more patient and submissive, but that could not be. Take thou the place side by side with thy suffering and patient Lord, and may He bless thee!

I do trust the questions I have started at the commencement will not be lost upon my hearers. It may strike you that it is not needful to answer whether you are Christ's disciple or not, but it will be very needful to answer that question soon. I have been struck beyond measure lately with our mortality, and with the suddenness with which we depart out of this world. Every now and then I hear from friends; I heard but this last week, 'Brother So-and-so walked into my shop on Thursday; on the Sunday I heard that he was dead.' 'Sister So-and-so was at the communion service, and

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within forty-eight hours she died.' Why, it is a dying world. You seem to be passing before me in a procession, coming and going; and I, too, am part of the procession myself. Oh! make sure; make sure work for eternity! Run no risk of your souls—not even this night's risk, for this night, at midnight, without a knock at the door there may come the messenger that shall say, 'Prepare to meet thy God.' And then—*and then*—it will signify whether you are Christ's disciple or not. It will not matter then whether you have been rich or not, educated or not; but it will matter all for all eternity whether you are His or not, for remember the division, 'These shall go into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.' God grant that you then may be with the company of the disciples of Jesus, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

VII

[Blessings Traced to their Source

'All my springs are in Thee.'—PSALM lxxxvii. 7.

IT does one good to think there are such things in the world as springs bubbling up in the shady nooks, places of sweet refreshment in this dusty earth. The mouth waters at the very thought of the palms of Elim and the wells thereof. If even to us fresh springs are a blessing, much more must they have been so to the psalmist, who lived in a dry and thirsty land, which owes all and everything to irrigation. Nothing is more precious to the oriental than a well, and he that finds a spring counts himself a much happier man than he who should have found a vein of precious metal. We must transfer, therefore, the thought of precious water springing up copiously, bubbling up with living force, to our spiritual condition, and then say with David, 'All my springs are in Thee.' That is to say, we trace all the mercies we receive to their fountain-head. The Psalmist was grateful for the blessings that were conferred upon him; he did not receive them with selfish inattention, but considering

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them well, he found that every good gift and every perfect gift came from his God. He had learned that not only everything good around him, but everything that was within him that was good, came from the same source; and discovering within himself a living power, a living well of water within his own nature, he traced that also to the grace of God, and said, 'All my springs are in Thee.'

Did not he mean, first, 'all the springs I drink of?' Secondly, did not he mean, 'All the springs that are within myself?' I do not know that those two heads comprise even one-tenth of the thoughts that might arise out of our text, but then we have not time to take such a great text as this and consider it in full. We shall therefore just take the two series of thoughts that will spring up under those heads.

I. The first thought is, 'ALL THE SPRINGS I DRINK OF ARE IN THEE.'

To begin, he may have remembered *the deep which lieth under*. In the benediction upon Joseph, it is said that he was to have the blessing of the deep which coucheth beneath. Deep down in the earth are vast reservoirs of water, and when these are tapped they spring up and we are refreshed by them. These are symbolical of the mighty fountains of eternal love, the electing grace of God, the infinite fulness of the heart of God in His own nature, for 'His nature and His name are love.' When we get to the great fountains of the infinite, eternal, immutable love of the Father

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towards His chosen people, then indeed we come to the fountain-head of all the streams which make glad the people of God. There is not a blessing we receive but it may be traced to the eternal purpose of God. We may see on every single benediction of the covenant, the stamp of the eternal purpose and decree. Streams of love I trace up to the Fountain, God,

‘And in His mighty breast I see
Eternal thoughts of love to me.’

Every Christian that is rightly taught, who understands the word of God, and is not afraid of the fulness of the truth, will ascribe all the springs of grace that ever he drinks of, to the eternal fount. Job says, ‘Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea? or hast thou walked in the search of the depth?’ This is a mysterious subject, and we cannot find out these secret springs, but yet we know that they are there; we rejoice in them and bless the Lord for them.

But, using illustrations from scripture only, when the psalmist said, ‘All my fresh springs are in Thee,’ for that is the force of the expression he uses, may he not have thought of *that rock from which the living water leaped* in the wilderness, so that all the multitude that were in the desert drank of the stream. Those who had true knowledge of God also drank of that spiritual rock which followed them, and we know that that rock was Christ. That rock, too, was smitten, and straightway it became

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a spring of water for all the tribes, even as our smitten Saviour has now become the spring from which all of us drink. So I may say :—

‘Rock of Ages, cleft for me,’
Thou my sacred fount shalt be.

We find, leaping from the cleft of His side, the cleansing blood and the refreshing water, too. As I said at first that we may trace all our blessings to electing love, I may now say with equal truthfulness, that we may trace them all to redeeming love. There is a crimson mark on every blessing of the covenant. You shall see on all the favours that God sends to us the mark of the pierced hand,

‘There’s ne’er a gift His hand bestows
But cost His heart a groan.’

That is a most sure and precious truth : as we look to our dear Lord upon the cross, and see Him also exalted in His glory, remembering that ‘it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell,’ and that ‘of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace,’ we can truly say of Him, ‘Emmanuel, all my springs are in Thee.’

We meet in the Holy Scripture with another illustration. In the times of Abraham there were certain wells which he dug, the possession of which was disputed by the Philistines, and when Isaac afterwards had to go into Philistia he found that the wells which Abraham had digged had been filled up by the Philistines. He therefore dug others, and the Philistines began to strive with

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his herdsmen. He moved on a few miles further, and dug another well, and the Philistines strove again for that. He moved again, for he was a peaceful man, and found they strove for that, and it seemed as if he could have no water without having to contend for it.

Sometimes the wells of which we drink are *springs concerning which there is grave contention*. There are some that deny the most precious doctrines of the gospel. There is a sound of archers at the place of the drawing of water, and when a poor, simple child of God would come and let down his bucket and take a draught, he finds the bowman's shaft going by his ear. Somebody has discovered that one doctrine is not scriptural, that another doctrine is not rational, so the thirsty soul becomes afraid to drink of that well. What is worse, if there should not be any controversy about the truth itself, he will find a controversy in his own soul as to his right to appropriate it. Satan, the accuser of the brethren, will remind him of his faults; will tell him he can have no part or lot in the matter, or else he would not be what he is. 'They that are delivered from the noise of the archers in the places of drawing water' shall bless the name of the Lord as they drink.

And truly, brethren, if we did but always recollect that it must be true that all our mercies come from God; that, whatever logic may insist upon, it must be true that salvation is of the

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Lord ; that whichever *ism* may be right, whichever side of controversy may have made an accurate statement, it must be correct that every good thing comes from 'the Father of lights with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning ;' then we should find that, let the enemy contest as he will, we have access to the refreshing stream. Since all the springs worth drinking of are in God our Father and Christ our Redeemer, we can come to these and drink without fear, for God is ours, and Christ is ours, and therefore every covenant blessing is ours, too. Therefore laying aside all disputing and contention, we come and drink of these wells because they are in God, and in Christ our Saviour.

We read, in the Book of Judges, of two springs of water ; you often mention them yourselves in prayer ; indeed, they are a kind of proverb in the Christian church. There were *the upper springs and the nether springs*. Now, every child of God that judges rightly knows that the nether springs are in his God ; I mean his lower comforts, his temporal mercies. What should we have of earthly good worth enjoying if God did not give it to us ? If thou gettest wealth, who gives thee power to get it ? And if thou hast health, who is it that preserves to thee thy strength of limb and the blood that still leaps within thy veins ? He has but to will it, and thou wouldest be a paralytic, or a consumptive like so many more. Thy children are spared to thee : bless God for each of them ; it is He that spares them. Thy husband or thy wife,

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thy brother or thy friend, the joys that cluster around the hearth—all these came to thee through Him. They are common mercies, we say; but we should not think them so common if we had to miss them for a while. Let us bless God, and see His hand, and say, ‘Great Father, even my nether springs are in Thee.’

But when we come to the thought of the upper springs we have no question. If we possess eternal life, He gave it to us. If we believe in Jesus faith is not a flower that ever springs from the natural soil of man’s heart. If we have repentance unto life it is the work of the Spirit of God. If we have been kept until now faithful to our profession, we have nothing whereof we can glory; we should have gone back from it if God had not preserved us. We have not had one single jot of anything from the first day until now but we have derived it from the Lord’s infinite mercy. All our upper springs are in Him: shall we not bless His name? And while we say, ‘Spring up, O well,’ shall we not also add, ‘Sing ye unto it,’ and bless and magnify that perennial fount of mercy which perpetually flows to us. The old classical poets went to Helicon for their inspiration; they drank of that spring upon Mount Parnassus; but, as for us, we will say with that poet of the sanctuary:—

‘Come, thou fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy praise.
Streams of mercy never ceasing
Call for songs of loudest praise.’

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We have no Parnassus, but we have a better mount:—

‘Teach me some melodious sonnet,
Sung by flaming tongues above :
Praise the mount—oh fix me on it,
Mount of God’s unchanging love.’

From this source will we derive the inspiration of our muse ; here shall we find the burden of our song. The upper and the nether springs come alike from God—yea, all my springs are in Thee.

You shall read, if you turn to the 104th Psalm, of *the springs that run along the valleys*. They are the places for springs, where wild beasts come to drink, and each one of them doth quench his thirst ; where the birds sing among the branches. You and I have had our valley mercies. We have been humiliated, perhaps, and we have sung :—

‘He that is down need fear no fall,
He that is low no pride.
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his Guide.’

We have been in the valley of Baca and made it a well, and the rain has filled the pools. We have been in the valley of fellowship with Christ, walking along the cool vale of communion with our Father who is in heaven, and behold it has been the place of springs—of springs full of water. There is not one joy in our best and happiest time but what

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comes from God. In our choicest moments, when we are fullest of the Lord, most free from the incumbrances of the earth, never, even then, have we anything that is of ourselves. If it be good it all comes from God.

Then, we read in Isaiah, and in some other passages which I need not quote, of *the streams of the desert*, 'I will give water in the wilderness and streams in the desert. I will open rivers in high places.' It is an odd place for rivers. 'Rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water; the dry land springs of water.' Do you recollect your dry-land springs? Can you not remember now when you did eat of treasures hid in the sand; when it was dark, and yet never was so light; when you were in the land of barrenness, and yet never were so filled with plenty; when you had abounding troubles, and yet never had such superabounding comforts? Oh! let us bless the Lord that our desert springs were in Him. They were in Him or we should not have had them. Had not the Lord been with us, we had fallen utterly and died in the wilderness like those who came out of Egypt, whose carcases strewed the plain.

If you turn to the 4th of Deuteronomy you will find a spring that some of God's saints drink of, that is not often mentioned—*Pisgah springs*. Moses there speaks of the springs that came from the foot of Pisgah, and, believe me, they are cool

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streams indeed, and drink that goeth down sweetly and maketh the lips of them that sleep to speak. He that knows what heaven is, and has by faith viewed it over, who has seen its security, its purity, its nearness to God, its revelation of the face of Christ, its communion of saints, its joy of the Lord, such a one has found the Pisgah springs to be very precious and very soul-reviving. Oh, for a draught of them now! I think some of us had such a draught at our last prayer-meeting when we talked together and sang that hymn:—

‘A scrip on my back, and a staff in my hand,
I march on in haste through an enemy's land;
The way may be rough, but it cannot be long,
And I'll smoothe it with hope, and cheer it with song.

The prospect of the coming glory makes the Pisgah springs well up, and all of them are in our God, for there were no hope of heaven without Him. There were banishment into eternal woe if not for His infinite grace.

Thus I might continue to use the similes of scripture, and show that whatever sort of springs there may be, they all come from the great deep of the infinite love of God, and that all our springs are in Him.

II. But now we come to our other point—namely, that ALL THE SPRINGS THAT ARE WITHIN US COME FROM THE SAME SOURCE. You know our Saviour's word to the man who drinks of the water that He gives is that it ‘shall be in

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him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.'

A Christian is not a cistern that is filled and emptied, but he is simply a receiver—a reservoir. By God's grace he becomes a living well. He is not a puppet moved with strings; he is not a machine that is wound up and goes by wheels mechanically; there is a living power in him. He is a new creature in Christ Jesus, instinct with the highest form of life, and that life possessed in the highest degree of freedom; for while a man is a free agent naturally, yet he is in a far superior sense a free agent when he becomes a converted soul. 'If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.'

Our text then may mean this, that *all the springs of my inner life*, if I possess them, lie in God. 'For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.' 'And you hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins.' Christ is your life. All the springs of life are in Him.

And hence, next, *all the springs of our secret thought* and of our devotion are in Him. You cannot always think of God and worship God alike. At least, if you can, and it is real devotion, I greatly envy you. I find in my soul there are times when I have the wings of an eagle and can mount up, and, with unblenching eye, look into the infinite glory, when I can soar on and on in strange ecstasy and delight. At another time I cannot rise from the ground. The chariot wheels are taken off as in

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Pharaoh's case, so that we drag heavily, and Dr. Watt's hymn seems appropriate :—

'Our souls can neither fly, nor go
To reach eternal joys.'

The preacher, too, is sometimes fertile enough, and at another time barren. Truly the Christian experience is not unlike Pharaoh's dream. He hath lean and fat kine; withered ears, and ears rank and good, come up. This is doubtless to show him that when he has sacred thought and devotion they come from God; in order that he may see that, he is sometimes left to prove his own emptiness. To show that the strength of Samson does not lie in muscle and sinew and bone alone, Samson's hair is shorn, and he goes forth as aforetime, but he performs no feat of strength. He is as weak as any other man. Yes, beloved, if we have any power of thought or sweetness of devotion and drawing near to God, all the springs lie in Him.

So is it most certainly with *the springs of our emotions*. Do you not find yourselves sometimes sweetly melted down by the power of God's word? Could not you at such times sit and weep under the thought of the death of Jesus and His unspeakable love to you? Sometimes do you not feel stirred with sacred joy, so that you could burst out with an impromptu hallelujah, or begin to sing a new song of His great love wherewith He loved you? At other times you think about the same theme, but your heart feels it not; the self-same

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song is sung, but though your lips join, your heart does not go with the minstrel. You know it is so.

You cannot command your own spirit ; the Lord must help you. The springs of your emotions lie in His hand. If He leave you, you are like the Arctic sea, frostbound, but when He comes and smiles upon you all the icebergs melt in a moment, and your heart feels the warm gulf-stream of eternal love flowing right through it. Then there comes the time of the blossoming of Spring, and the singing of the birds ; the whole heart is alive unto the Most High. The springs of your devotion as well as your sacred thought all lie in Him.

And I am sure it is so with regard to *the springs of all true actions*. Christians are not all thought and all emotion ; they are practical men and begin to work for God. But did any of us ever do a good work in our own strength ? We have done many works in our own strength, but were they good for anything ? The Saviour shall decide that question. 'Without Me ye can do nothing,' He says, 'Ye can bring forth fruit without Him, but your fruits are as the vine of Sodom and of the fields of Gomorrah.' Only that is right which comes from Him. When He blesses us, our actions done for Him are accepted through Him. Well, beloved, it will always be so, that our springs of holy zeal, our springs of joy, our springs of fellowship, our springs of every kind that are worth the having, all lie in Him ; and it will be good if the church recognizes that. We cannot get up a

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revival; it is a great pity that we should ever try, for such a revival, if we seem to get it, will be very mischievous; but the Lord can send us a revival.

All our springs are in Him. We must not depend upon ministers, and say, 'If so-and-so shall preach there will be good follow.' Our springs are not in these poor cisterns, they are in our God. When will the church try to look right away from the creature to the Creator? When will she purge herself of that hereditary fault of hewing out for herself broken cisterns, and forgetting the fountains of living waters? I am persuaded, from my own experience, the more I live upon God alone, the more I truly live, and the less I know of anything like power or wisdom or grace or anything of the sort pertaining to myself the better. The more I decrease and He increases, the more do I grow up in the Lord in all things. May we, then, adopt, each one of us, this sweet motto, and say evermore, 'All my springs which are within me, as well as those of which I drink are in my God.'

I shall only keep you long enough to say three things more:—

The first of which is, *let us look to these springs*. If you do not feel up to the mark, if you are dull and heavy, and have no springs in yourself, remember that they never were there. 'All my springs are in Thee.' You feel empty? Well, you only feel as you always are. You feel as though there was death written upon you. Quite so, there is. But your life is in Christ; your fulness is in

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Christ; your strength is in Christ. Has it been reported to you that Christ has lost His power, that His life has declined? If so, you have great cause for weeping indeed; but while He is the same the well of water is the same. I know to-night that you are like Hagar; the water is spent in the bottle. Well, it never was much of a bottle, and it leaks; now you think, 'What shall I do? All my little store is gone.' 'What aileth thee, Hagar?' There is a well near thee. Open thine eyes, for God sees thee, and God provides for thee. Christ is the same. 'Oh, but I think I have forgotten Him,' you say. Remember Him, then. 'But I fear I am not one of His people.' Well, if you are not a saint you are a sinner, and He came to save sinners. I always find the short cut to the devil to be the best one. 'Oh!' saith he, 'thou art no child of God.' 'No,' I say to him, 'nor art thou either.' 'Ah!' saith he, 'but you have no true experience.' 'No,' say I, 'I have not, nor have you either; but one thing I know, I am sinful, and Christ has said that, washing in His blood by faith, I shall be made clean. If I cannot go as a saint, I will go even now as a sinner. Suppose I have been in the past mistaken, I will begin again.' Child of God, that is the only way to end the controversy. Go and stand at the foot of the cross again. Begin again, for all your springs are still there. Though you cannot find any springs in yourself, they are still in God.

The next thought is this. If all my springs are

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in God, then *let all my streams flow to God*. All the rivers run into the sea, because they all came from the sea. It was from the sea that the sun drew up the clouds which feed the thousand rills which fall into the rivers, and so the rivers run back to the sea. Let us do the same. What we have had from God must go to God. Even in temporals we ought to do this. I remember a story of Martin Luther's. When certain monks complained that the income of the monastery had got very slack, 'Yes,' said he, 'and no wonder, because once they used to entertain two strangers at the monastery, the one named "Date," the other named "Dabitur." "Give" was the name of one. "It shall be given," was the name of the other. Now,' said Martin Luther, 'you turned out *Give*, and very soon God took away *It shall be given*, for they are two brethren, and they live together. If thou wouldest have Dabitur back, thou must have Date. If thou wouldest have back *It shall be given*, thou must have back *Give*.'

When we are not serving God acceptably, consecrating to God, we lose supplies from God. In temporals I have known men give to God by shovelfuls, and God sent them waggon-loads by the back door; they could not send back their substance as fast as He sent it in, for He has said, 'Good measure will I give to you, running over,' and many have found it so. Your mean skinflints have gone on flint-skinning until they died, and had hardly enough to be

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buried with respectably, while others have scattered and yet increased. If our springs are in Him even in temporal things, let the streams run back to Him; let us not rob God. And, as to spiritual things, let us give back to God the love He gives us, the faith He gives us, the spiritual strength He gives us. Let us use for Him the experience He has given us, the instruction He has given us. Let us instruct and encourage others to His glory with what we ourselves have received. Let us lay out every talent, and keep none buried in the earth. May the Lord grant we may recollect and evermore say to Him, that as 'All my springs are in Thee,' all my streams shall be to Thee.

And, lastly, *let us have a great deal of hope about other people*, because if all the streams are in God, I have not got to consider when I go forth to do good to my fellow men what is in them. I have to consider what is in God. When I address a sinner, and say, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,' if I do that because I have a notion that the man can believe, I am making a very gross mistake. If I do it because God tells me to do it, and utter that just as I would have said to the dry bones, 'Live,' if I do it as a prophet, in God's name, being perfectly sure they cannot live of themselves, then I am doing right, for I am exercising my own faith. It is an act of faith on the preacher's part, and God will bless that act of faith, and many of the dry bones will live; sinners will believe and will repent.

We must not think that our hope lies in what is

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in the sinner. I think I heard a man preach of the adaptation of the sinner to the gospel. I thought him a mighty fool, for what is there in the sinner but everything that is opposed to the gospel, everything uncongenial, everything that would put the gospel to death if it could? All the power of the gospel lies in itself, not in the sinner; salvation comes from God and God alone. Therefore there is no reason why I should not preach the gospel with a hope of success in Wandsworth Prison, or in the lowest slums in London. You may scatter a tract, and give a warning to the harlot and the thief with good hope of success. In fact, there are often ridges in the lowest soils, like the clearings of the backwoods in the West, which are not ploughed and tilled till the goodness has gone out as it were; to them the gospel comes with a strange novelty.

It was so in the Saviour's days. The Pharisees, who knew so much, rejected His word, but the publicans and harlots entered into the kingdom of heaven before them. If I were bidden of God to preach the gospel in hell, I should be safe enough to preach it, and believe it would be effectual to salvation there, so far as the characters of persons were concerned, if it were God's will that it should be so.

Therefore, there is nothing about the sinner that we have need to tremble about, because if he be dead, God can lift him up; yea, if he is like Lazarus, dead and buried, the voice of God can

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call him forth from the tomb. Yea, if he were as nothing, God maketh the things that are not to be mightier than the things that are. He can bless where all was cursed. Out of the stones of the brook He can raise up children to Abraham. Let us have great comfort next Sunday in going to preach, or to teach in the Sunday-school, or in other forms of usefulness. All the springs lie in God, and if we are going to work in a dry and thirsty land where no water is, never mind. Our springs are in God; our faith is in Him; and according to our faith so shall it be done to us. Amen.

VIII

The Places where God Blesses

'And he blessed him there.'—GENESIS xxxii. 29.

JACOB had asked the angel, 'What is thy name?' He got no answer to that enquiry; in fact, he was gently rebuked. The angel did not come to gratify Jacob's curiosity, but he came as a messenger from God with a blessing. 'And he blessed him there.' There are a great many things we should like to know when we read the Bible, but if we read it so as to find salvation, that will be much better than having our curiosity gratified. When we come to hear a sermon, too, we should like perhaps to meet with some fine passages, or to have some telling anecdotes that we could carry away with us; but if, instead, the Lord's messenger shall give us a blessing from God Himself, it will be infinitely better. The disciples wanted to know from the Saviour something about the times and seasons, but He did not tell it to them. He only told them that they should be filled with the Spirit not many days hence. That was far better, far more valuable to them, and though

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for the time it might not please them so much, yet, for all practical purposes, it enriched them far more. Angels' names we can afford to leave, but God's blessing we must have, and we cannot do without it. 'He blessed Him there.'

Let us just think for a minute or two what this blessing was which Jacob gained as the result of a night of prayer. I wonder whether anybody here ever spent a night in prayer. Is there a man among us that ever has wrestled with the angel for so long? Alas! I am afraid to put the question and ask for an answer lest I should only gain one through your silence. Brethren, it is not easy to continue for a night in prayer. It has been well observed that it is easier to hear a sermon two hours long than pray for an hour. The more spiritual the exercise the sooner we tire. Joshua was not weary of fighting in the valley, but Moses's hands began to grow weary with holding them up in prayer. Yet surely there have been exigencies in our lives, as in that of Jacob, when a night of prayer would have been becoming. Surely we have been in as great straits and struggles as he, and have needed the benediction of heaven as did that much-tried patriarch. Perhaps it would be well ere long to try this master-feat and wait from sunset to sunrise with God.

The old knights, before they took a higher degree of knighthood, spent a night in some church and were supposed to be in prayer. He that shall spend a night in prayer shall win celestial blessings. He

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shall lie down a Jacob, but he shall rise up a prince. There is a distinct advance from Jacob to Israel, from being a supplanter to being a prince. Prayer gives an incalculable blessing. And this is the advance Jacob gained, an incomparable advance in spiritual things.

But besides that, he gained, as the blessing attending that night's prayer, deliverance out of great peril. He thought that he and his would have been slain by Esau, but the angel blessed him and not a single lamb of all his flock was hurt; neither were the women and children put to the slightest fear. Prayer brought down heaven's shield to cover Jacob in the hour of danger.

Again, he got what was better still under some aspects, reconciliation with his brother. He had done his brother grievous wrong, but his brother forgave him. I do not know, but I think a Christian man would almost sooner be exposed to peril than live under a sense of having committed an injustice. It is a great relief to one's mind when you have done so, to find it all set right again. To think 'I did that man a wrong, but it is gone and forgiven for ever,' is a blessing worth praying all night to obtain.

Happy was Jacob also to have the breach healed between himself and his brother, to meet him and fall upon his neck and kiss him; to feel that being so near akin they should no longer be divided in heart. Art thou divided from thy brother? Has any root of bitterness sprung up to trouble thee?

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Have the friendships of life been curdled by dislike? It were well to have a night of prayer to get them back again and again to serve side by side. I take it to be a vast blessing to a Christian man to be delivered from the temptation to retaliate, to be saved from all hardness of heart and bitterness of spirit. The angel, when he gave him that, blessed him indeed.

Besides all these blessings, in addition to have risen in rank before God, to have had his wrong amended, to having been forgiven by his brother, to being restored to friendship, I do not doubt that from that night a blessing rested upon Jacob's heart, and the dews of that night fertilized his soul for years to come. He was anointed with fresh oil from that moment, and as he rose, halting upon his thigh, he was not merely a better man by title, but better by nature. He had been in a far-off country away with Laban, and so much of the dew had gone from him, but now that he had got back again into Canaan, the angels sealed his return by giving him the blessings of the return. Such were the blessings of Jacob. I should not wonder if there are some here who have said, 'I know in a measure, personally, what those blessings are and wish I enjoyed them to the full.' My prayer, beloved brethren and sisters, is that even to-night God may bless you. According to your necessity may He shape the blessing, but, oh! may He bless you indeed and bless you here.

I am going to speak on this wise. What was the

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place where Jacob got his blessing? Are there not other such places? And, lastly, may not this be one of them?

I. First, then, WHAT WAS THE PLACE WHERE JACOB GOT HIS BLESSING, this choice blessing?

And the answer comes, first, *it was a place of trial*, very peculiar trial. He had just got out of Laban's clutches to fall in the way of Esau. He had fled from a lion and now a bear met him, and he feared that his wives and children would be destroyed utterly by his revengeful brother. It was a fearful trial, and the mere fear of it must have left scars on his heart. Yet 'He blessed him there.' Is not this a very usual circumstance with the people of God, that their severest trials are the places of their choicest mercies. I remind you how often this has been the case, how Cowper's words have been true :—

'The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercies, and shall break
In blessings on your head.'

Believe that for the present trial on which you are perhaps now entering. 'He blessed him there,' there where He tried him. He will bless you there, there where He is trying you, in the waters, in the furnace when thou art refined again and again, and the hot coals are heaped upon thee, He will bless thee there. The disciples feared, we are told, as they entered into the cloud, but it was there that they saw the Saviour transfigured. And often we fear

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the cloud into which we enter when we are only coming into the secret place of the Most High, where under the shadow of the Almighty we shall have yet more delightful visions of Himself.

If we were wise we should begin to welcome trials. We should rather fear to be without them than not. For up till now what do we not owe to the furnace, to the rod, to the threshing flail? Scarce has a mercy of any great spiritual value come to us at all except by the way of the cross. I am sure I may look upon every choice blessing I have enjoyed as having come to me in rumbling waggons like the good things which came from Egypt to old father Jacob. We have been blessed in places of trial; let us not, therefore, dread to go to such places again, but go on our way towards heaven feeling that whatever difficulty we meet with shall only be another of the spots in which God shall bless us. 'He blessed him there.'

It was also a place of pleading. That is most noteworthy. 'He blessed him there,' where he spent a night in prayer; there where he began a wrestling match with an unknown stranger; there where he would not let him go; there where he held him fast until he gained the benediction. 'He blessed him there.' If you are short of blessings, resort to the place of mighty prayer. All things are open to the man who knows how to pray importunately. 'The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force.' Mark you, Jacob's wrestling was no child's play. I have

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seen painters attempt to depict it, and only now and then have they caught the idea; but one of them represents Jacob as trying most lustily to give his antagonist a back fall, and no doubt he did tax his strength to the utmost till, in the dead of night, he was faint, faint with the toil he had gone through.

Begging must be real work. It is said of begging that it is the worst trade in the world; but a man that is to make anything of prayer must throw his whole soul into it. Your prayers that hardly have life enough in them to live, your words that hang like icicles beneath your tongues, that are scarce heard by yourselves, how think you they will be heard by God? If there is not enough prayer in us to stir our own hearts, how can we expect that God should be moved by our entreaties? There He blessed him, there he prevailed. And if you want a blessing you must go in that way. When you get to the state that you will take no denial, that you shall sooner die than not be blessed, you shall get it, for 'There He blessed him.'

Again, in addition to its being a place of trial and a place of pleading, *it was a place of communion.* Do you recognize it? He called it 'Peniel' or 'the face,' because there he had seen God face to face. O beloved, these are things to feel rather than to speak about. To see God! Blessed indeed are the pure in heart when they get this benediction. To come so into union with Christ as to be able to look to God with an eye

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that is not blinded with fear. Oh! to speak with God, pouring out our hearts before Him, and to hear Him speaking with us, the promise no longer lying like a dead letter on the page, but leaping out of the page, as though instinct with life, as though God had just spoken it and we were hearing it from His divine mouth? Do you know what it means? Can you read Solomon's song and say, 'I understand it?' Is it your experience that you have ever fed on the body and blood of Christ, having His very life in you? If you have, then have you seen God, and it will be said of you, 'He blessed him there.' Brethren, we miss a thousand blessings because we are too busy to commune with God. We are here, there and everywhere, except where we ought to be. We are running to this and to that, instead of sitting with Mary at the Master's feet. He blessed Mary as she sat there, and there, too, will He be sure to bless us.

But once more where Jacob got the blessing, *it was a place of conscious weakness*. The angel touched the sinew in the hollow of his thigh. While he got the blessing he got lameness, too, and he might be well content to carry that lameness to his grave. I have often found the place where I have seen most of my own insignificance, baseness, unbelief and depravity has been the place where I have got a blessing. Did you ever try to preach and fail in the doing of it, and have you not found that God blessed you there? Have you ever tried to be

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earnest with the Sunday-school children, and were earnest, too, but in your own judgment you made a fool of yourself? Have not you found that God blessed you there? Is it not often one of the greatest blessings that can occur to us to be made to think little of yourselves? May not God be enriching us most when He is emptying us and preparing us for the largest possible benediction, when He is making us to see the completeness of our destitution?

The most unpleasant places to us in life are often the places where the blessing comes most. 'He blessed him there.' He took the rich man from his palace and made him live in a cottage, but 'He blessed him there.' He took the strong man from his vigour and laid him on a sick bed, but 'He blessed him there.' He brought down the man of full assurance into a state of trembling and anxiety, but 'He blessed him there.' He brought the man of busy usefulness down to be a patient sufferer, unable to stir hand or foot for the Lord he loved so well, but 'He blessed him there.' He took the man of good repute and suffered his character to be evil spoken of, and his good name to be withered, but 'He blessed him there.' Oh! it is often so. We halt with lameness, with shrinking of the sinew, the precious thing wherein our strength did seem to lie, but that may be the very means to a benediction which otherwise we should never have received.

I would encourage, then, each one of you to seek a blessing. I think most of you have been in the

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house of trial: get a blessing there. The place of pleading, at any rate, is open to you all: get a blessing there. The sacred spot of communion! We may get the blessing there. And I suppose most of you have had your times of humbling and of stripping and getting very low. Oh! may you get a blessing there.

II. So I turn very briefly to notice that THERE ARE OTHER PLACES where Christians get blessings besides the place where Jacob won his.

Beloved, there is a place—(how shall I speak of it?)—where the Lord blessed us. It is *of old in eternity*. God is so glad to bless His people that He began betimes. ‘Betimes’ do I say? He began ere time began. He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundations of the world. When the decree was given, when the covenant was established, when the election was determined upon, He blessed each one of us there, if indeed we are believers in Jesus.

I might point to a thousand spots *all down the line of history*, and say that all of us in Christ were blessed there. But I will only linger at the cross and say, Where Jehovah was made a curse for us and suffered in our stead, ‘He blessed us there.’ And at that open empty tomb, from which escaped the living Saviour whom the bands of death could not hold—He blessed us there. He who died for our transgression, rose again for our justification, and by His resurrection blessed us there. And

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when he stood on Olivet about to depart, and pronounced the blessing upon His disciples, He blessed us there. And as He ascended up on high, leading captivity captive, from His royal chariot He cast lavishly with His hands ten thousand gifts for the sons of men, which He had received even for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them. He blessed us there. And up in heaven, where He sits till His work is done, He points to His wounds and points to our names and reminds the Father of His love to us. He has blessed us there, for He has raised us up and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. 'He blessed us there.'

But as *there are places in your own experience*, beloved, where He has blessed you, I would take some of you back in your history to the moment when you first knew the Lord. I often try to refresh your memories about that, and I do not think I can do it too often. Where was the spot when you were laden with woes and sins, when you saw Jesus Christ and looked to Him and at once were lightened? Where was it? When was it? Twenty years ago, perhaps; with some of us more than that; with others only two or three years ago; with others of you, perhaps, it is only a week ago. Well, whenever it was, when He led you to see the Saviour, He blessed you there, as you never have been experimentally blessed before. I should not wonder that the day is marked down in your diary, though there is little need it should be, for it is

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marked on the tablets of your memory, and you will never forget it. O blessed spot, O happy moment, when Jesus first met with me! He blessed me there. Well, since that time have not there been other places where He has blessed you? I might mention every trial you have had and say, He blessed you there. I might mention every benefit you have received, and say, He blessed you there. But time would fail. Only I will remind you that when you have been prompt to obey your Lord and keep close to Him, and have not suffered any cloud to come between you and Him, He has blessed you there. If you have kept up that spirit of obedience take care still to let your eyes be to Him as the eyes of a handmaiden are to her mistress, for, He will bless you there. And have not you found that when you have been most empty and had least self-reliance, He has blessed you there? When you have been very weak and little in your own esteem and ready to die, and felt that you were nothing, and less than nothing, has He not blessed you there. When you have been kept low, without an ambitious thought, down on the very ground before Him, and been afraid to look up from a sense of unworthiness, has not He blessed you there? Oh! keep to the low places then. There is no place like the Valley of Humiliation.

‘He that is down, need fear no fall,
He that is low, no pride.’

He has blessed you there. It would be difficult for

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me to say where He has not blessed me. Wherever He has led, wherever He has directed me, seeking His blessing I have found it, and therefore will I bear my witness to His faithfulness. Well, by-and-bye, when your time will come to die, He will bless you there. Before that time you may be a sufferer, He will bless you there. You may lose the dear husband, who now is your strength, or the loved wife who now is your comfort, He will bless you there. You may have to go to the grave with one child after another, and you yourself may be very weak and scarcely have life within you, but He will bless you there. What He has been He will be. If God grew worse, we might doubt, but since He changeth never, and is without shadow of turning, let us look back through the many days since first we met Him and He met us. Remember, we have been upheld till now, and He has helped us in every need.

‘After so much mercy past,
Will He let us sink at last?’

Now what I am saying is very commonplace, and might suggest itself to anybody here, but at the same time, when we get into trouble, it does not suggest itself, and you have need to be reminded of these simple principles. He blessed you there, and in such place He will again bless you.

One more word about that, and it is this. Has not He often blessed you *in the house of prayer*? Has He not blessed you in listening to the Gospel? I know He has. Never, therefore, neglect the

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house of God. Has not He blessed you at the prayer-meeting? Cannot you say, 'He blessed me there?' Well, let us see your face there as often as possible. Has not He blessed you at the communion table? Oh! if there be under heaven an ordinance that is Christ's looking-glass, if there be under heaven a hand that can withdraw the blind and pull up the lattices and let us see the King in His beauty, it is the Lord's Supper. He blessed us there. Let those who despise the table stay away, but those who have got the blessing will wish to be often there, and come again and again, saying, 'Sirs, we would see Jesus.' He blessed us there.

III. We have seen where God blessed Jacob, we remember where He blessed us, and now, in the third place, let me ask, IS NOT THIS ONE OF THE PLACES WHERE WE MAY EXPECT HIM TO BLESS US? Is there a man here who never had a blessing from God to his own knowledge, and who is saying, 'I wish God would bless me, even me?' Are you willing, if God helps you, to give up all your sins? Would you wish to be clean of them and clear of them? Well, soul, if thou desirest that, God will bless thee now. For if thou wouldest be rid of sin, God would wish thee to be rid of them, and so you and He are agreed. He will be sure to blot your sins out, and tread them under His feet, through His dear Son Jesus Christ. Do you say you want a blessing? I will put another question to you. Are you willing to have Jesus Christ be your

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Saviour, not in part, but altogether? Will you let Christ be the first and the last? Will you take Him not to be a make-weight, but a Saviour who can save you from head to foot, who can give His blood to cleanse you, His righteousness to cover you, Himself to be all in all to you? Soul, if thou wilt take a whole Christ He waits to be received of thee. Only trust Him and He is thine. 'To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God.'

There was a soul once that wanted Christ, and 'He blessed him there.' There was a soul once that wanted to be rid of sin, and 'He blessed him there.' There was a soul that said, 'Lord, save, or I perish,' and 'He blessed him there.' There was another that said, 'God be merciful to me a sinner,' and 'He blessed him there.' There was one that cried to Him, and He did not seem to hear, and at last she came in the press and touched His garment's hem, and He blessed her there. And there was another that He called a dog. 'Yet,' she said, 'the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the Master's table,' and He blessed her there. Oh! anxious, seeking, timid, trembling souls, do trust in Jesus. Rest in Jesus and He will bless you now, and you shall go to your place rejoicing.

There may, perhaps, be here Christians in trouble. Brother, sister, I do not ask you what your trouble is, and I do not want to know, but there is a little text I would like to whisper to you, 'Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth

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for you.' Will you not trust to Him after that? If so, He will bless you there. Is your trouble and care temporal want? Let me put this into your mouth as a sweet savour, 'Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him.' Suck that down and He will bless you there. Oh! what a blessing will come out of the marrow and fatness of that thought! Is there a poor Christian here, who says, 'I feel half ashamed to go to the communion table; I am so unworthy?' Turn your eyes again to the cross. Look to the Saviour for worthiness. You never were worthy, and never will be. He will bless you there. 'I feel so cold and chill,' says another. Think of the Saviour's love to poor, dead, cold sinners such as you are, and He will bless you there. If you are very cold, it is no use thinking of the cold in order to get hot; the best thing is to go to the fire. And if you feel dull and dead, do not try to get better by turning over and examining yourself; fly away to Jesus Christ and He will bless you there. Let all of us now say, 'Dear Lord, meet with us; show us Thy hands and Thy side,' and if we come to His throne in that spirit of desire He will bless us there.

The Lord be with us all, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

IX

Christ Seen as God's Salvation

"Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."—LUKE ii. 30.

THOUSANDS of times that song of Simeon has been sung by careless, thoughtless persons, but surely it is one of those songs that ought never to come except from believing lips. To make it merely a part of a liturgy, and for shamelessly living men to say, '*Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation*,' must be an atrocious sin before God. Let every one who has ventured to use such words as these without having thought of their meaning, confess their sin before God and ask that He would make those words to be true which have hitherto been so frivolously uttered, and that ere they close their eyes in death their eyes *may* see God's salvation.

I. I shall first of all take THE TEXT AS IT DROPS FROM SIMEON'S LIPS and follow his leading. We will start with Simeon's main idea. He came into the temple, he saw there a little babe, and he recognized in that newly-born child Jesus the promised Saviour, and as he took up that Saviour

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into his arms, and said, 'Mine eyes have seen'—what? 'Thy salvation;' God's salvation—not the worker of the salvation only, but the salvation itself. From which I gather that wherever we see Jesus we see God's salvation; wherever our eye spiritually lightens upon the Christ of God there we see salvation. Whether in Bethlehem's manger or on the cross, or on yonder throne of glory from which He shall judge the quick and the dead—wherever we see Him we see the salvation of God.

Let me then take your thoughts along the history of our Saviour for a moment. Far back into the ages when as yet this world and sun and moon were not created—when God dwelt alone—then in the foreknowledge of God it was apparent that man would sin—that elect men, beloved of God, would fall in the common ruin. Then came the grand debate, the mighty question to be only solved by the supreme intellect of heaven, 'How can sinners be reconciled to God?' and the covenant was formed, that ancient covenant of which David sang—'Ordered in all things and sure.' Jesus, the second person of the blessed Godhead, entered into covenant with His Father, that in the fulness of time He would stand in the sinner's place and pay the sinner's debt; that He would lead up in Himself as many as the Father gave Him, and become the second restoring Adam to them, though through the first and falling Adam they, with others, had been destroyed. Then when the covenant was signed, and the divine parties to that grand trans-

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action struck hands and ratified the bond, mine eye, as it looks into that vast eternity and with holy curiosity, desires to scan that council chamber—mine eye perceives God's salvation in the person of Jesus Christ.

This was all that could have been seen by faith, even after the world had been created and man had fallen, until that day when the fulness of time was come—when Jesus Christ, Who had covenanted to save His people, came to perform the work. Oh! the grandeur of that day when angels came in haste to sing that the babe was born in Bethlehem. Ah! Simeon, what thou seest there is not merely a babe—a little child hanging upon a woman's breast—it is the Word incarnate—the *Logos* without Whom was not anything made that is made. He that spake, and it was done, lies there. He that said, 'Light be,' and light was—the wisdom that was with God when He balanced the clouds and when He fixed the sockets of the Universe; even He is there in the person of that child. The Son of Mary is also the Son of God, and whenever we look into the God incarnate and understand the mystery, 'The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us,' and men chosen of Him behold His glory—'the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth'—then, when you see God in human flesh you see God's salvation.

Follow with the eyes of your love that babe when He had become a man. See Him, in the obedience of thirty years to His reputed father, handling the

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adze and the hammer in the carpenter's shop of Joseph. 'Being found in fashion as a man He humbled Himself.' See Him in the three years of His most blessed ministry. What work was crowded into those few months! How did the zeal of God's house eat Him up! The dews fell upon Him in the night when He kept the sheep of God in the wilderness and on the mountain's brow shepherding them in midnight prayers. Oftentimes the sweat fell from Him in that daily service which, as the servant of servants, He rendered to all His brethren. None toiled as He, so arduously, none so perfectly, none so willingly; none with so complete a bending of His whole faculties to His all-absorbing work. Behold the righteousness of the saints. This work of Christ is making a robe in which the saints shall be arrayed. His active obedience renders unto God a recompense for our breaches of His holy law. In Christ, the actively obedient, you see God's salvation.

But, oh! let your eyes swim with tears as you follow Him from His active to His passive obedience. I stayed midway in a verse just now, 'Being found in fashion as a man He humbled Himself;' as you go on, you read, 'and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross.' There is He in yonder garden among the olives, do you hear His sighs, His deep-fetched groans? Do you mark the sweat drops of blood as it falls upon the earth? He is pleading, 'If it be possible let this cup pass from Me,' but possible it is not. Do

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you see Him hurried away with the felon's kiss still upon His cheek—hurried away by traitorous hands to Caiaphas—hurried to Pilate and Herod, one after the other—scorned and scoffed at everywhere. He whose visage is bright as the morning when the sun ariseth, and whose countenance is like Lebanon, comely as the cedars; He it is that they make nothing of and scout and scoff at. Into His face, which angels look on with hushed awe, they cast their accursed spittle; they buffet Him, and say, 'Hail King of the Jews'; they mock His royalty with a crown of thorns and His priesthood by binding His eyes and saying, 'Who is it that smote Thee?' He Who is in this shame is God's salvation remember. He is made lower than earth's basest menials that He might lift us higher than heaven's brightest seraphs: coming down from where He was in heaven's excellency to all this depth of shame, that out of all our shame He might uplift us to the excellency supernal.

Then at length it comes to a climax and the patient sufferer gives His hands to the iron and His feet to the nails. They lift Him up; a felon's death He must die. Without the camp must He suffer. Made sin for us He cannot be in the congregation. He must be numbered with transgressors. Behold Him dying in bodily pains not to be readily described! But, bethink you, the worst was this—God, to whom good men look for succour when they die, refused Him help. Jehovah, who never did forsake the virtuous, forsook Him,

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the most virtuous of all. He who is our castle and high tower, our rampart and defence in our extremity, hid, as it were, His face from Him and that bitterest of all cries which contains in it as much grief as all the shrieks of the damned in hell went up, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' There was He, the forsaken one, yet He was God's salvation, for He was :—

'Bearing that we might never bear
His Father's righteous wrath.'

Enduring to be cast away of heaven that we, base as we are, might be enfolded in the divine bosom and loved with the divine affection.

Nor is this all. On the third day He, who on the cross had conquered, rose to claim the victory. Behold Him! he is God's salvation as He rises from the tomb. 'Where is thy sting, O death? Where is thy victory, boastful grave?' Jehovah Jesus has saved us from death, He has risen from the sepulchre. Behold Him as He ascends! Let not your eyes be too dazzled with the glory. He rides in solemn pomp up to heaven's gate. Your ears can even now catch the echoes of that song, 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up ye everlasting doors, that the King of Glory may come in.' He that enters through has saved us, and has gone to receive gifts for men. His entrance there is the entrance of all His people, for He is their representative, and takes possession of heaven on their behalf. Being there for us we are saved; His

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presence on the throne is the presence of God's salvation.

If time did not fail me I would like to pursue the story and point you to Him looking still like a Lamb that has been slain, pleading with His never-ceasing, ever-prevalent, intercession. I would like to bid your faith anticipate the day when He shall come again with no sin offering but unto salvation, when you and I shall see God's salvation seeing Him, when our bodies shall be perfected, no more to be weak and suffering, but made like His glorious body. Our brethren that have gone before us, who at this moment sleep in their silent tombs amongst the purple heather, or in the crowded cemetery, or in the chill vault, they also shall hear the sound of His second advent when the herald blast shall bid the world know that the Lord has come, and

‘From beds of dust and silent clay
To realms of everlasting day’

they shall wing their triumphant course, for Jesus Christ shall be to them, as to us, God's salvation. That was Simeon's idea, I think; we have but hammered out his ingot of gold a little, ‘Where Jesus is, there is the salvation of God.’

II. And now in the second place we shall take SOME LEAVES OUT OF OUR OWN AUTOBIOGRAPHY. The text says, ‘*Mine* eyes have seen Thy salvation.’ Simeon must not be allowed the monopoly of these words. I claim them, ‘*Mine* eyes have seen Thy

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salvation.' Brethren and sisters, many of you can, in a spiritual sense, use the same language as this patriarch about to depart. You, too, can say, 'Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.' Will you turn over the book of your life awhile as I turn over mine?

Well, we need not read those early pages, the pages of our estate of sin. Drop tears and blot them out. Dear hand of Jesus stained with blood wipe down each one of them and blot them out for ever. But what is this first bright page? It is the page where we began to live; the page that records our spiritual birth, and I think we shall find written somewhere across it, 'This day mine eyes beheld God's salvation.' Well do I remember that day. I had looked here and looked there. This was the question. I had offended God—how can He forgive me? It was no use to tell me God was merciful, I had an answer for that—'God is just.' It little availed to say, 'Sin is little,' I knew better. It was heavy to me; what must it be to Him? The question I wanted to have answered was—How can God in justice pass by my iniquities? Then did I learn, as in a moment, this sweet story which it has been my delight to tell in various forms a thousand times, that Jesus came and said, 'I will be the sinner's Surety. I will stand in His place of curse and ruin, and will bear for Him the penalty of pain, for Him I will bear even death.' I learned that if I looked—just looked and that was all, that if I trusted—did *simply* trust in Jesus, I should be saved. I looked—I looked, and, happy day, mine

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eyes saw His salvation. That blessed doctrine of substitution, that simple command, 'Believe and live,' that was the glass through which my soul looked and saw God's salvation.

But if I remember rightly a little further on—in my case it was not above a week after I had seen my sin forgiven, I felt myself in another difficulty. I found I could not do what I would. My will was now never to sin again, but I did sin. I willed to be holy, but I was not what I would be. I groaned and cried, 'Where is salvation from this evil heart of mine, from this corruption of nature?' And I remember well going to the same place where I had heard of the Saviour, and hearing the minister declare that if any man felt in himself the evil nature, he was not saved. 'Ah!' I thought, 'I know better than that;' I could not be persuaded of that. I knew I was saved. I had looked to Christ, and I did find that I was where Paul was when he said, 'To will is present with me, but how to perform that which I would I find not.' I seemed then to say to myself, 'My will is so fickle; how can I hold on? My power is so feeble; how can I stand against sin?' Ah! and well do I remember the day when I could say in a more emphatic sense than before, 'Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.' For as I searched the Word I perceived that as many as believed in Christ had eternal life, and eternal life is not a life that lasts a little while; it is what it is said to be—*everlasting* life.

Then I perceived in the Word that against this

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everlasting life the old body of sin and death would struggle, but that it was written that the new life was a living and incorruptible seed 'which liveth and abideth for ever.' And I discovered the apostle's words, 'Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.' It was a grand discovery when I perceived that the life God had given me could not die any more than God could; that it was a beam from Himself; that He had made me a partaker of that divine nature, since I had escaped the corruption that was in the world through lust; that the Spirit of the Most High was given to the believer to dwell in him and to be with him for ever, and that He who began the work had declared that He would carry it on and perfect it unto the day of the appearing of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

When I learned that truth I felt as if I had not seen God's salvation before. I had seen so little of it the first time, enough to make me leap for joy, it is true; but on the second discovery I beheld that He that redeemed me from the guilt of sin would quite as certainly redeem me from the power of sin; that He that set me on the rock would keep me there; that He that put me on the road had said about all His servants, 'I will put My fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from Me.' That was a glorious discovery! None of your twopenny-halfpenny salvations that some people profess to have, that only last for a day or two, or a few weeks at most, and then

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depart. In Christ to-day and out of Christ to-morrow. Christ hath pardoned their sin, and yet they think He hath not given them salvation! But to know that 'the gifts and calling of God are without repentance,' that He hath said, 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be *saved*,' that 'The righteous also shall hold on his way,' that 'he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger,' that the Word of Christ stands sure, 'I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hands,' this is to see God's salvation in a broader light. I pray that every hearer who has seen Christ may go on to see more of Christ till he has seen his full security in the person of the Well-Beloved.

But further on (and it was with me a long time after), when I had discovered that the Christ who saved me from the guilt was also pledged to save me from the power of sin, then I found afresh that he was God's salvation. I discovered partly through thought, and partly through the clear testimony of the written Word, that every soul that believes in Christ believes in Christ because God made him believe in Christ. That concerning that soul there was a purpose made by God that that soul should be a believer, and that purpose was made from all eternity—was made or ever the earth was, and that purpose once made could never be changed. It was like the mountains of brass which could never be moved. I say that the salvation of the believer in Christ did not rest on his own will,

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but on God's will ; that the purpose that saved him was not his own purpose. Even as it is written, ' It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.' Why, I remember that was as good a discovery to me as the very first ; it was almost like another conversion. I had been up to the ankles in the water of life before, but now I was up to the very breast, and what could I say but this :—

'I'm a monument of grace,
A sinner saved by blood,
The streams of love I trace
Up to the fount of God ;
And in His sacred bosom see
Eternal thoughts of love to me.'

Here it was that ' mine eyes have seen God's salvation '—seen the source of it, the secret springs of it, the eternity of it, the immutability of it, and the divinity of it. I pray that every burdened child of God may get to see that also. Then will he sing for joy of heart indeed.

Probably, dear brethren, we have not all gone further than that, if so far ; but it is a very blessed thing when we are led to see another truth—namely, that every quickened believer is one with Jesus Christ. We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. The Christ in heaven is the same Christ who is here on earth in every one of His saved ones ; they are all parts of Him. There is a vital union subsisting between them, so that whatever Christ is they are. They were one with

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Him of old, they were one in the grave, one when He rose, one when He triumphed o'er His foes, and they are at this day one with Him as :—

‘Now in heaven He takes His seat,
And angels sing all hell's defeat.’

Every believer is as much one with Christ as the finger is one with the body. If I lost my finger I should not be a perfect man as to my body ; and if Christ lost the meanest member of His body, it would be a part of Christ that would be lost, and Christ would not be a perfect Christ. We are one with Jesus by indissoluble vital union, and if your soul perceives that, you will clap your hands and say to the Father, ‘I have seen Thy salvation indeed, for now I see that I am in heaven.’ He ‘hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.’ We are saved and glorified in Christ Jesus as our representative and covenant head.

Not even yet have I exhausted this theme, and I only pray that you and I may go on to know yet more and more the heights and depths of God's salvation. I was thinking just now before I began to preach that, if ever you and I should be permitted to look down upon the world of misery—if in some future state we should ever gaze into that land of darkness and despair where sinners cast away from God are suffering the due reward of their sins ; if our eyes should ever see their agonies, and our ears should ever hear their cries of despair,

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we should, among other things, say 'My God! I never knew before how great Thy salvation is, for I also had been there, but for Thy mercy. Until I saw something of what hell is, I could not tell how much I owed Thee, I could not say, that, in its heights and depths, mine eyes had seen Thy salvation.'

And, brethren (to put a better, a more pleasing light upon it),

'When I stand before the throne
Dressed in beauty not my own;'

when I shall see Him—and see Him I shall, for it is written, 'Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold and not another;,' when you and I shall cast our crowns at His feet; when we shall raise our voices with all the white-robed throng in the everlasting Hallelujahs, then we shall say, 'My God my Father, "Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."''

III. Time fails me, and so I must pass on to spend a few minutes in a third portion of my topic. It is this, THERE ARE SOME HERE WHO HAVE NEVER SEEN GOD'S SALVATION. The gospel is hid to them; and if it be hid, it is not hid because we have used hard words to hide it. 'If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them who are lost, in whom the God of this world has blinded the minds of those who believe not.' Blind sinner, dost thou desire to see the salvation of God? Ah! sayest thou, 'If I know my own heart I do.' Why, canst thou

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not see it then, man? It is very plain. Ah! I see, thine eyes—*thine eyes* are sealed up.

The first seal I see on thine eyes like a fixed scale (and, oh! I wish I could take it off for thee) is this, Thou dost not even believe that thou needest any salvation. The man who does not believe he needs saving of course will never see God's salvation. In heart thou sayest, 'I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing;' my poor friend be persuaded to take God's opinion of thee, which is much nearer the truth than thine. Thou art naked, and poor, and miserable; thou art lost, ruined and condemned, as it is written, 'He that believeth not is condemned already.' Is that scale gone?

Now I see another (I wish that I could take that off, too), and that is, thou knowest thou art blind, but thou sayest, 'I must try and save myself.' This is a very thick scale. You will never see while that is on thy eyes. Do you not notice how Simeon put it; not 'Mine eyes have seen *my own* salvation,' but, 'Mine eyes have seen *Thy* salvation'—that is, God's salvation—the Lord's salvation. Let me tell thee, poor man, if ever thou art saved thy salvation must be God's in the beginning, God's in the carrying on, and God's in the concluding. No salvation will ever serve thy turn but one which is divine from top to bottom. If nature's fingers could nimbly spin a garment that should cover human nakedness, it would be of no avail. All that nature spins God must unravel before a soul can be clothed in the righteousness of Christ. It is

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not your doings, man, it is Christ's doings that must save you, not your tears, but Christ's blood; not your feelings, not anything in you or from you. Listen, thou hast an ear to hear it: 'Salvation is of the Lord,' of the Lord from first to last. Oh! if that scale come off thine eye, I know that thou wilt say, 'Now I begin to see enough to know that I cannot see. I have just enough light to discover the darkness I am in; I see that none can save me but God, He must do it, but will He save me? Will He save me?'

Lend me thy finger, man; God, by His Spirit, make my hand His Spirit's hand. Dost thou see? No, thou dost not, but there is the hem of Jesu's garment; touch that with thy finger and thou shalt be restored to sight at once. I mean this. Jesus died to save such as thou art, trust Him and thou art saved, thou art saved completely and at once. A physician who was under some concern of soul asked his patient, who was a godly man, 'Can you explain to me what faith is?' 'Yes,' said his godly patient, 'I can let you see it very soon if God will let you see it. It is like this: You see, I am very ill, I cannot help myself, I do not attempt to do it, I have confidence in you, I put myself into your care, I take what medicine you send me, I do what you bid me. That is faith. You must trust yourself in the hands of Christ like that.' That is it. When you, my dear friends, wholly and entirely trust yourself in the hand of Christ, then your eyes have seen God's salvation.

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I have no time for more, I wish I had. But I want to say this final word to everyone who has seen God's salvation. Perhaps one of you is poor; well, go home to-night, saying, 'I am poor, but mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.' One of you perchance is in suffering, then say, 'I feel ill; never mind, mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.' And perhaps there are some warnings and intimations that make another of you think you will soon be called to die. Consumption is undermining your constitution; never mind, don't fret, your eyes have seen God's salvation. How much better to die in a garret or in a ditch and see God's salvation, than be carried in the most pompous manner to your grave a soul that knows nothing of God and of the Saviour. O you that are much tried and much troubled, bear up, bear up, your sorrow will not last much longer. When you and I get to heaven, as I trust we shall, as I *know* we shall, if we are resting on the atonement of Christ, these troubles by the way will only be matter for us to talk of, and to say to one another, 'How graciously the Lord hath held us in His providence, and how wonderfully He hath brought us through every trial! Even in my poverty mine eyes saw His salvation. In my sickness and in my death I did but see it all the more clearly because of the clouds and darkness that were round about me! God bless you, dear friends. I earnestly pray that you may all see God's salvation. May He hear the prayer, for Christ's sake! Amen.

X

The Hope that Purifies

'And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself even as He is pure.'—1 JOHN iii. 3.

THE Christian is a man of much present enjoyment. 'Beloved, now are we the sons of God,' and, being God's sons, we cannot be altogether unhappy. Relationship to the ever blessed God must bring with it a measure of joy. 'Happy art thou O Israel,' sang Moses, 'who is like unto thee O people saved by the Lord.' The men who can be truly called the sons of God are a blessed people. Still, the main portion of the believer's inheritance lies in reversion. It is not so much what I have as what I shall have makes me joyful. 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be.' To the unbeliever all that is to come is in darkness. He may expect to go from the shades of evening to the blackness of a midnight that shall never end, but for the Christian 'light is sown.' He is in darkness now—the only darkness he shall ever know, and from the twilight of the morning he shall go unto the perfect day,—a day whose sun

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shall no more go down. We have the eyes of hope given to us, and looking athwart the narrow stream of death and beyond that place where to carnal eyes hangs the curtain that shuts out the unseen,—we, with these far-seeing eyes behold the glory which is to be revealed and we are blessed with the joys of hope. Let every Christian, therefore, when at any time he is downcast about the things of the present, refresh his soul with the thoughts of the future.

We have often discoursed of the past and I know that some of us have frequently been cheered and comforted by seeing how kindly God hath dealt with us in bringing us up out of the hole of the pit whence we have been digged. Now we shall get further consolation by seeing what is to become of us in the future yet to be revealed; but, still, my object at this time will not be to impart consolation so much as to excite to holiness; our text is a ~~very~~ practical one, and while it deals with hope it has more to do with the result of that hope in the purity of the believer's life.

Let us go at once to our work. We shall note first the believer's hope, and, secondly, the operation of that hope and, thirdly, use the operation as a test of the hope.

I. To begin, then, let us look at THE BELIEVER'S HOPE. The text speaks of men that have hope—'hope in Him'—which I understand to mean hope in Jesus Christ.

The Christian has a hope peculiar to himself.

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As for its object, it is the hope of being like Jesus Christ. 'We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.' Now some would not put it in that shape: they would say that their hope as Christians is to tread the golden streets, pass within the pearly gates, listen to the harpers harping with their harps, and, standing upon the sea of glass, be for ever free from toil and pain. But those are only the lower joys of heaven, except so far as they indicate spiritual bliss. I do believe that there are some professing Christians who would like Mahomet's heaven and be perfectly satisfied if they could sit on a green and flowery mount and could drink from rivers of milk and honey, and so on, and so on.

But, after all, the real truth, the truth that is contained in these metaphors and figures, and underlies them all,—the truth is that the heaven a true Christian seeks after is a spiritual one—it is the heaven of being like his Lord. I take it that while it will consist in our sharing in the Redeemer's power, the Redeemer's joy and the Redeemer's honour, yet, from the connection of the text it lies mainly in our being spiritually and morally like Him,—being purified as He is pure. I must frankly confess I would cheerfully renounce, of all my expectations of heaven, ten thousand things if I can but feel that I shall have perfect holiness; for if I may become like Jesus Christ as to His character—pure and perfect—I cannot understand how any other joy can be denied me. If we shall have that, surely

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we shall have everything. This, then, is our hope—that we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.

Every man, morally, sees what he himself is. A man who is bad sees evil, he is blind to good. The man who is partially like Christ has only a partial view of Christ. You might almost know your own character by your view of Jesus. If thine eye sees not inexpressible beauty in Him it is thine eye that is to blame, for He is altogether lovely, and when the eye of our inward nature shall come to see Jesus as He is, then we may depend upon it that we are like Him. It is the pure in heart that see God, because God the inexpressibly pure One, can only be seen by those who are themselves pure. When we shall be perfectly pure we shall be able to understand Christ; and when we understand Christ or see Him as He is, as we shall do at His appearing, then we shall be like Him. Like Him free from sin, like Him full of consecration to God, like Him pure and perfect, To-day He is conqueror over sin and death and hell, He is superlative in His virtue and His holiness, He has conquered all the powers of evil; and one day we, too, shall put our foot on the dragon's head, we, too, shall see sin bruised beneath us and shall come off more than conquerors through Him that hath loved us. This, then, is our hope that we shall be like our Head when we shall see Him.

But why do we expect this? *What is the ground of our hope?* The context shows us that

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we do not expect to be like Christ because of anything that is in us by nature or any efforts that we ourselves can make. The basis of all is divine love; for, observe, the chapter begins, 'Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God.' We expect to be like Christ, the beloved of God, because we are also beloved of God. It is the nature of the love of God to make its object like God. We therefore expect that love will work with light and purity and make us into light and purity too.

The chapter goes on to say that we have been called sons of God and are really so. Well, that is another ground of our hope: we hope to be like Christ because the sons of God are like each other. The Lord has said that Jesus Christ shall be the first-born among many brethren. Whom God loved 'He also did predestinate to be conformed unto the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren.' Very well then, since we are adopted into the divine family and are to be made like the elder brother, we, therefore, believe that we shall be one day like the Lord Jesus Christ in the perfection of His excellence.

Then we have this further buttress for our hope, if it be not a main pillar of it,—That we are now one with Jesus Christ. Therefore, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him. There is an intimate connection between our souls and Christ. He is hidden, therefore we are hidden and the world knoweth us not. He is to be revealed—there is to

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be a day of his manifestation to angels and to men, and when He is manifested, we shall be manifested too. Knowing that we are united to Christ by sacred mysterious bonds, we, therefore, expect that when we shall see Him as He is we shall be like Him.

Still, for simplicity's sake, it is well to say that the basis of our hope lies altogether in Him. 'He that hath this hope *in Him* purifieth himself.' Beloved, all true hope is the hope in Christ. If thy hope lieth in thyself it is a delusion. If thy hope lieth upon any earthly priest and not upon this one High Priest of our profession, thy hope is a lie. If thy hope standeth with one foot upon the work of Christ and the other foot upon thine own resolutions or merits, thy hope will fail thee. Hope in Him is the only hope which can be acceptable to God—the only hope which will bear the stress of thy weight, the only hope which will stand the test of the trial hour and of the day of Judgment. Our hope, then, of being like Christ is a hope in Christ. We are trusting Him; we are depending upon Him. If He does not make us like Himself, our hope is gone. If ever we are to get to heaven it will be through Him and through Him alone; our hope is in Him from top to bottom—our Alpha and Omega is He—the beginning and end. There our hope begins and there our hope ends. Thou, O Christ, art all our confidence! We know of none besides. This, then, is the believer's hope; a hope to be made like Christ; a hope based upon Christ.

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II. But, now, coming to the practical business of the sermon, our text speaks of THE OPERATION WHICH HOPE HAS UPON THE SOUL. 'He that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself.

It does not puff him up: it purifies. I know there are some who will say, 'Well, if I had a hope, a sure hope,—full assurance and expectation that I should go to heaven, I think I should feel myself to be someone.' Yes, very likely you would, but then you do not possess such a hope, and God does not mean to give it to you while you are in your present condition. But when the Lord makes a man His child then He takes away the evil heart out of his flesh,—when He shows a man His great love to him He humbles him, He lays him low, and so the expectation of heaven and of perfection never exalts a man. If any man can say 'I am secure of heaven and I am proud of it,' he may take my word for it that he is secure of hell! If thy religion puffs thee up, puff thy religion away, for it is not worth a puff. He that grows great in self-esteem through the love of God knows not the love of God, for the love of God is like the fish that the Lord put into Peter's boat: the more full the boat was the more it began to sink. O Lord, the more the glories of Thy love shall strike my eyes, the humbler I shall lie.

Again, a man who has this hope of heaven in himself—let me correct myself, this hope of perfection in himself—finds that *it does not give license to sin*. I have heard some say, 'If I had a

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good hope and knew I should go to heaven, I should live as I liked.' Perhaps you would, but you have not got the hope and God will not give it to you while you are in such a state that you would like to live in sin. If a Christian man could live as he liked, how would he live? Why, he would live without sin. If the Lord would indulge the new-born nature of His own children with unrestricted liberty, in that unrestricted liberty they would run after holiness. The unrenewed heart would like to sin, but the renewed heart quite as eagerly loves to obey the Lord. When the Lord has changed thee, He can give thee not only a hope but a full assurance that that hope shall come true, and yet thou wilt walk all the more carefully with thy God, for 'he that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.'

This hope, then, does not puff up and does not lead to license. You can see why it is so. *Gratitude leads to holiness.* Any man who feels 'God has saved me and I am on the way to being made like Christ,' if he be a man at all (and he must be to feel that) will say 'Now I owe to God all this, how can I show forth my gratitude?' He must be a brute, he must be a devil, he must be seven thousand devils in one who would say, 'God is doing all this for me and, therefore, I will continue in sin.' Well did the apostle say of such that their damnation is just. But where there is the good hope of heaven the man naturally says, 'O, my Lord, hast Thou loved me so well and hast Thou provided such a

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glorious portion for me hereafter? Now I will obey Thee; I will serve Thee. Help me to run in the ways of Thy commandments.'

Such a man, when led of the Spirit, also feels that *holiness is congruous to his expectations*. He expects to be like Christ. Very well, then, he says, 'I will try to be like Christ. If I am to be possessor of a perfect nature the most natural thing is that I should begin to seek after it now.' If the Lord intends to make you heirs of immortality to dwell at His right hand, does it seem right that you should go now and live as others do? Suppose you know to-night (and I hope many of you do) that ere long you will be at God's right hand, does not it seem a shameful thing that you should go and become a drunkard, or that you should be dishonest? 'It is not for kings, O Lemuel,—it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink,' and, surely, it is not for children of God to drink the wines of sin and go after the sweets of iniquity. It is not for princes of the blood Imperial descended from the King of kings, to play with the filthy lewdnesses of this time and with the sins of earth. Surely an angel would not stoop to be a carrion bird, neither can we suppose it congruous, nor does it appear seemly, that he who is brother to Christ and is to dwell for ever where Jesus is, should be found in the haunts of sin. The very natural fitness of things, under the blessing of God's Spirit, leads the child of God to purify himself, since he expects to be completely like Christ ere long.

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Now without tarrying longer upon that, let me notice that *the believer is said here to purify himself*. If we are very orthodox we can afford to use language that does not look so, but people that are heterodox usually have to be extremely guarded in their expressions. Now we do not believe actually that any man purifies himself, and yet the text says that 'every man that hath this hope in Him purifies himself.' We believe that the Holy Ghost purifies men; we expect to behold

'the water and the blood
From the riven side that flowed
Be of sin the double cure.'

We lay all purity at God's feet believing that He is the Creator of it. Still the text says that every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, that is to say (for there must be a meaning in this, and the other must also be true while this is true), God the Holy Spirit works in every man who has a true hope, so that he labours to become purified and uses all means to overcome sin and to walk in righteousness. While I am speaking upon this point may each one of us be examining himself. When a man has a true hope in Christ he begins to purify himself by the power of the Holy Spirit.

First, *he puts away all the grosser sins*. Perhaps, before conversion he had been unchaste; he had been lewd in language and in act, he had been dishonest, he had been a blasphemer. Conversion does away with all that. I have been sometimes astonished and delighted when I have seen how

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readily these sins are put to death. They are taken out to the block and executed. Many a man that never lived a day without swearing, from the moment of his conversion has never had a temptation to it. So thoroughly will God change the heart that these grosser sins go at once.

But there are sins of the flesh, which, though we be purged from them, will endeavour to return, and hence the man who has a hope of heaven will purify himself every day from them; he will hate the very thought of those sins and any expressions or actions that might tend towards them. He abhors them; he flees from them, for he knows that if he begins to dally with them he will soon go from bad to worse. He understands that in this warfare to fly is the truest courage, and, therefore, from such sins of the flesh he daily flees like Joseph, even though he should leave his garment behind him, that he may get away from them. He purifies himself.

Then *he purifies himself from all evil company.* Those spirits that he once thought choice he now avoids. If they will go with him to heaven he will be glad that they should join his company, but if they will neither repent of sin nor believe in Jesus he saith to them, 'You can be of no further service to me.' If he can help them to heaven he seeks them out and tries to win them, but, when they ridicule him, he is afraid lest their example may be injurious to him, and he shuns them and seeks better company. He purifieth himself.

Then *he begins from that day forth till he dies,*

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seeking to purify himself. Perhaps, first, he does not know some things to be sin which he afterwards finds out to be so. As the light gradually shines into his soul, he puts away this and that and the other with a strong and resolute hand, and if there was some sin that pleased him much, which was to him like a right hand or a right eye, he cuts it off, or tears it out; for, having a hope of heaven in him, he knows he cannot take any sin to heaven and he does not want to. He puts it away; he knows he must put it away before he can enter into life eternal.

Soon he finds out that there are certain sins in his nature which more readily overcome him than any others. Against these he sets a double watch. Possibly, he has a quick temper. Over this he grieves very much, and he prays to God doubly, 'Lord, conquer my temper! Keep my tongue, lest I say bitter words, and my heart, lest I indulge in unkind feelings.' He finds himself in a trade and if in such trade there is sin (and most trades have some peculiar sin) he feels, 'Then I will have nothing to do with it. If I cannot make money without sin I will lose money or change my business, but I will not do that.' He observes some sin that runs in his family; he knows that his household has some peculiar fault. Here, again, he cries to God, 'Lord, purify me and purify my house from this!' He observes that there are certain sins in the district where he lives. Against these he cries. He knows that there are sins

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peculiar to his position. Is he a rich man? He is afraid of growing worldly. Is he a poor man? He is afraid of becoming envious. He looks at his position and observes what the peculiar sins of that position are, and then in the power of the eternal Spirit he seeks to purify himself from each one of these sins.

Perhaps he is travelling for his health and he knows that many travellers, though they profess to be Christians, never observe the Sabbath and forget to a large extent the regular habits of devotion which they had at home. So he sets a double watch over himself there and in that respect. Is he in great trial? Then he knows the temptation to impatience and murmuring will come, and he tries to purify himself from that. Has he great pleasure? Then he knows the temptation will be to make this world his home, and so he tries to purify himself from that. You see, brethren, under the power of God's Spirit, this purifying of the life is a great work to be done, but it is a work that every man that hath this hope in Him will do. If he be indeed hoping in the Lord Jesus this will be the great struggle and warfare of his life to get rid of this sin, and then of the other, that he may be sanctified unto the Lord—a holy man, fitted for a holy heaven.

Now, then, how does he purify himself? I have shown what he does; but, by what means does he do it? *He does it, first, by noting the example of Christ.* The hoping man reads Christ's life, and

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he says, 'Here is my model, but I am far short of it. O God, give me all that there was in Christ! Take off from my character all the excrescences, for these must be excrescences if they be not in Christ.' Familiarizing himself with the life of his Saviour, and getting to commune with Christ, he is thus helped to see where sin is and to hate it.

Then *he prays God to give him a tender conscience.* Oh, I wish some Christians had a tender conscience. I have heard of persons who are blind beginning to read with their fingers, but beginning late in life, they have had some manual labours to perform which have hardened their fingers, and they could not read. I am afraid some of you have hard consciences—two or three thicknesses of horny skin over them. You want to have the lancet used to make your conscience tender again. It is a blessed thing to have a conscience that will shiver when the very ghost of a sin goes by—a conscience that is not like our great steamships at sea that do not yield to every wave, but, like a cork on the water, that goes up and down with every ripple, sensitive in a moment on the very approach of sin. God make us so. This sensitiveness the Christian endeavours to have, for he knows that if he hath it not he will never be purified from his sin.

He tries always to keep an eye to God and not to men. That is a great point in purity of life. I know many persons whose main thought is of other people's opinion, their question is, 'What will

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they say? What will the neighbours say? What will Mrs. Grundy say? What will be commonly thought of it?' You will never be a holy man till you don't care a fig what anybody says except your God, for a thing that is right is right anywhere. If it is right before the Lord, it is right although all the world should hiss it down. Oh that we had more moral courage, for moral courage is essential to true holiness. The man who has this hope in him will not say, 'If the door be shut and nobody hears of it I may feel free to do the evil,' or, 'I am in a different country where the customs differ; therefore I will do as others do.' No; such hypocrisy shows a rotten heart. The man of God will say, 'This is right before the Lord, and, though no eye sees me to commend, though every tongue should speak against me to blame, it is the same thing: I will do the right; I will eschew the evil.' An eye to God, this is one way by which the Christian purifies himself.

And then *he notes the lives of others and makes them his beacons.* If you were steering down the Thames in a vessel and saw a boat ahead of you run upon a shoal, there would be no necessity for you to go there to find out where the true channel was: you would let other shipwrecks be your beacons. So the Christian, when he observes a fault in another, does not stand and say, 'Ah! see how faulty that man is!' but he says, 'Let me shun that fault.' And when he sees the virtue of another, if his heart is right, he does not begin to pick holes

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in it and say, 'He is not so good as he looks,' but he says, 'Lord, there is a sweet flower in that man's garden! Give me some of the seed of it. Let it grow in my soul.' So other men become both his beacon and his example.

A wise Christian tries to purify himself *by hearing a heart-searching ministry*. If the ministry never cuts you, it is no use to you. If it does not make you feel ashamed of yourself—aye! and sometimes half-angry with the preacher, it is not good for much. If it is all smoothing the way the feathers should go and making you feel happy and comfortable, be afraid of it, be afraid of it. But if, on the contrary, it seems to open up old wounds and make the sores to fester and make the soul bleed before the living God, then you may hope it is the hand of one whom God is using for your lasting good. The true Christian not only wishes the preacher to search him, but his prayer is to God, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts.' He does not want to live in a sin, thinking it not to be sin, but he wants to get away from it. I am afraid some Christians do not want to know too much of Christ's commands: there might be some very awkward ones and they do not want to attend to some of them. Very pleased they are if they can get somebody to say that some of Christ's commands are non-essential and unimportant. Ah, dear friends, he is a traitor to his Master that dare say that anything that Christ says is unimportant. It

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is always important for a servant to do as his Master tells him, and it is an essential thing to comfort and to obedience that whatsoever the Lord has spoken we should endeavour to perform in His strength.

I might continue thus to show you the way by which the Christian, who has a good hope, endeavours to purify himself, but I must just notice this one thing, that *he sets before himself Christ as his standard*. He purifies himself, even as Christ is pure. My dear friends, we shall make a mistake if we make any man our model save the Lord Jesus Christ, for in anybody's life there will sure to be something in excess. I am sure it will be best for us, if we are Wesleyans, not always to try and do everything as John Wesley would do, and if we are Calvinists, much as we shall honour John Calvin, to remember that we shall go wrong if we try to season everything with the spirit of John Calvin. No man is fit to be a model for all men except the Saviour who redeemed men.

In white all the colours are blended. A perfectly white substance combines all the colours of the rainbow merged in true proportion, but green or indigo, or red are only the reflections of a part of the solar rays. So John, Peter, Paul—these are parts of the light of heaven—these are differing colours and there is a beauty in each one of them. But if you want to get the whole you must get to Christ the perfect Lord, for all the light is in Him. In Him is not the red or the blue, but in Him is

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light, the true light, the whole of it. You are sure to get a lop-sided character, if any man shall be the copy after which you write. If we copy Christ we shall attain a perfect manhood through the power of His Spirit. Oh, brethren, what a life-task is here for you! He that hath his hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure. We shall never be able, beloved, to throw down the tools and say, 'Now I have finished. I have no more sin to fight with, no more evil to overcome.' I have heard of some brethren who say that, but I think it must be a mistake. If there be a possibility of getting to that condition, I mean to get at it, and I would recommend you all to try after it, but I think till you die you will have some evil to struggle with. As long as you are in this body there will be enough tinder for one of the devil's sparks to take a light at. You will have need to keep on damping it, and every moment be on the watch tower, even till you cross the Jordan. This is our life's business, and, brethren, I do not know that you can have a better business, for while you are contending against sin, purifying yourselves by the precious blood, you will be bringing honour to God; your heart will become a field in which the power and grace of God will be displayed, for He will come and purify you, He will be the real Purifier while He is using you to purify yourself.

III. I must stay no longer, but in the last place, USE THE TEXT AS A TEST. 'He that hath this

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hope in Him purifieth himself.' Dear hearers, the question is, have we a true hope in Christ? If we have, we purify ourselves—we labour to purify ourselves as Christ is pure.

Now there are some professors who go the opposite to this: *they defile themselves*. They defile themselves, I say. Shame that I should have to say it. They were baptized on profession of faith, but they were never cleansed from their old sins. I have heard of persons that have come to the Communion table who will go to the table of the drunkard too. He that hath the true hope in Him purifies himself. How can you be said to have that hope if you love such sin? I have heard of professed Christians, and my cheek has blushed when I have heard it of them, who could use wantonness, sing wanton songs and do wanton acts and yet said they had a hope of heaven. O sirs, do not deceive yourselves. You do lie! If you are not pure and chaste you are none of God's children. You may fall into sin by surprise, but if you calmly and deliberately go to that which is unclean, how dwelleth the love of God in you?

I have known a man like to hear a good sermon, and like to mingle with those who frequent the ale-house and to sing 'a jolly good song.' He was a boon companion of the wicked. Well, labour under no mistake, sir. 'He that committeth sin is of the devil.' There is no making any excuses and apologies. If you are a lover of sin, you shall go where sinners go. If you who live after this fashion

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say that you have believed in the precious blood of Christ, I do not believe you, sir. If you had a true faith in that precious blood you would hate sin. If you dare to say you are trusting in the atonement while you live in sin—you lie, sir; you do not trust in the atonement; for where there is a real faith in the atoning sacrifice it purifies the man and makes him hate the sin which shed the Redeemer's blood.

After all, holiness is the test. So let the great fan throw up the chaff and the wheat together, and let the wind go through and sweep the chaff away. You come here and sit as God's people sit and sing as God's people sing, but, ah, some of you are a disgrace to the profession you make—I know you are. May God forgive you and give you grace to repent of this your sin and come to Jesus Christ and find pardon in His precious blood! This is, after all, the test, 'He that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself.' How can he have that hope in Him if he defiles himself?

But there are some others who while they do not actually defile themselves, yet *they let things go very much as a matter of course*. They do not purify themselves, certainly, but they go down the stream. If there is a good tone at home, they do not object to it: if there is an evil one they do not rebuke it. If they are in the shop and anybody speaks upon religion, they chime in. If anybody ridiculed it, perhaps they would not join in it, but they would be very quiet and get up in a corner.

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They never take sides with Christ, except when everybody else is on His side. True, they do not take sides with the devil, but they mean to be betweenites and neutrals and slippers in. Well, you will slip, one of these days, into your appointed place and that I think ought to be a particularly low place in hell; because a sinner who outs with it honestly is a respectable sort of a fellow, but those mean creatures who try to get enough religion to cheat the devil with, but never come straight out and avow Christ—why, methinks, they deserve a double perdition. They know better, they prove their knowledge by a little sneaking affection to the right and yet they cleave to the evil. The dead fish that floats down the stream has only one fault; but down the stream it goes for that one fault; and the man that gives himself up to the current in which he is, proves himself to be spiritually dead. What, sir! Did you never say, 'No!' Did you never put your foot down and say, 'I will not do this'? Others have to fight to win the crown, and you expect to get it by lying in bed. Do you think there are crowns in heaven for those that never fight their sins? Do you believe there are rewards in heaven for those that never followed Christ and never endured hardship for His sake. Nay, make no mistake; ye know not what the truth is.

The truth is in that famous picture of John Bunyan's. While I tell it may some be moved to make that picture true. He tells us that the

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Pilgrim saw in the interpreter's house a beautiful palace, and on the top thereof there walked many persons clothed in gold; and from the roof there came the sweetest music that mortal ear had ever heard. He felt that he would fain be on the top of that palace with those that there so happily basked in the sun. So he went to see the way thither, and saw at the door that there stood a number of armed men who pushed back every person who sought to enter. Then he stood back in amaze. But he noted that there sat one at a table having a writer's ink-horn and a brave man from the crowd, of stout countenance, came up and said, 'Set down my name, sir!' And when his name was set down on the roll, he at once drew his sword and began to cut at the armed men. The fight was long and cruel, and he was wounded, but he gave not up the conflict till he had cut his way through, making a living lane through those that had opposed him. So he pressed his way in, and the singers on the top of the palace welcomed him with sweet music, singing :—

'Come in, come in!
Eternal glory thou shalt win.'

Now, sir, if thou wouldest go to heaven it is all of grace and through the precious blood of Christ; it is all by simple faith in Christ, but yet every man that gets there must fight for it. There is no crown except for warriors; there are no rewards except for those who contend for the mastery

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against flesh and blood, against Satan and against sin. Whose name shall we set down to-night? Is there a man of stout countenance whom God has made resolute against sin? Let us set his name down. Only, when you put down your name, remember he that putteth on his harness must not boast as though he put it off. There is much that you will never perform except the Eternal God be at your back; nevertheless, if you have this hope in you, if you have received this hope from God, if it is a hope based upon sonship, upon Divine love—a hope ‘in Him,’ even in Christ, you shall win the day; you shall purify yourselves, even as He is pure, and when He shall appear you shall be like Him, for you shall see Him as He is. I pray the Lord to bless this sermon to the preacher and bless it to every one of his hearers, and He shall have the glory. Amen and Amen.

XI

A Painful and Puzzling Question

'How is it that ye have no faith?'—MARK iv. 40

THIS question may be very properly put to those who have no faith at all, and we intend so to put it in the second part of our discourse. But it was originally put to men who had some faith, men who had faith enough to make them disciples of Christ, faith which brought them to sail in the same vessel with Him. Even when they reproached Him, and said, 'Carest thou not that we perish?' they had faith enough to make them call Him 'Master.' Yet, in comparison with the faith which they ought to have had, Christ calls their faith no faith at all. They were so wavering, so tossed about with unbelief, that though they were His hearty, honest and sincere followers, He yet speaks to them as if they were unbelievers, and says to them, 'How is it that ye have no faith?'

I shall address this question, then, first of all to God's people, and, in the next place, to the unconverted.

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I. First, LET ME SPEAK TO GOD'S PEOPLE.

Let me say, to begin with, *that this is a question which must have been peculiarly painful to Him who asked it.* The faith in which they were lacking was faith in Himself—their Master, their Lord who loved them from before the foundation of the world, and who intended to shed His precious blood for them, and to make them His companions in glory, world without end. Yet they had no faith in Him! Let the Lord Jesus come to you, my brothers and sisters, and I think you will detect much sorrow in the tones of His voice when He says, 'How is it that ye have no faith, or so little faith in Me? I have loved you; to the death I have loved you; remember Gethsemane and Golgotha; remember all that I did, and am doing still, for you; how is it that you doubt Me?' Beloved, if we doubt our fellow-men it is not strange, for Judas is one of a large family, but to doubt the Saviour, the faithful and true friend that sticketh closer than a brother, this is a cut as unkind as any of the lashes which fell upon His shoulders when He was chastised in Pilate's hall.

You will see that the question pained Him if you will notice to whom He addressed it. 'How is it that ye have no faith? ye chosen twelve, ye who have been with me from the beginning, ye to whom I have expounded the mysteries which have been left dark sayings to the multitude without. How is it that my choicest friends, the picked ones of My band, have no faith in Me?' And the Lord

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seems painfully to put this question to some of us. 'How is it that ye have no faith, ye who are written in My book, nay, written on My hands and graven on My heart, bought with My blood, snatched out of the jaw of the lion by My precious power, and restored from all your wanderings by My loving care. How is it that ye, My favourites, the King's own chosen companions, how is it that ye have no faith?'

And the question was painful for yet a third reason—namely, that they had no faith upon a matter in which one would have thought they might have believed. They were in the vessel with Him, and if the ship went to the bottom they would go to the bottom in good company, for their Lord was with them, and yet they had not faith enough in Him to believe that He would save their lives. Perhaps they knew His ability; if so, they questioned His willingness. Perhaps they knew His willingness; if so, they questioned His ability, and, in any case, it was very painful that they should think their own dear Friend, their Lord and Master, would let them sink when the glance of His eye could save them, or the will of His heart could deliver them. And now, this question, as Jesus Christ puts it to us, must be very painful to Him. 'Do you not, O My child, do you not believe *Me*? Mine is an unchangeable love, a love that is stronger than death, a love which led Me down into the grave for you; do you not believe Me? If others doubt Me I can endure their unbelief, but

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unbelief from you, My acquaintances, My own familiar friends—oh! this is hard! You have sat under My shadow, and do you doubt Me? You have eaten of My fruit, and it has been sweet unto your taste, and do you doubt Me? My left hand has been under your head, and My right hand has embraced you; I have brought you into My banqueting house; I have feasted you with food such as angels never tasted; I have filled your mouths with songs such as seraphs never sang; I have promised you a heritage such as princes upon earth might well envy, and do you doubt Me? Do *you* doubt Me, and do you doubt me about such a matter as whether you shall have food to eat and raiment to put on? Do the lilies doubt Me? Do the ravens doubt Me? And will you doubt Me about a matter concerning which lilies have no care, and the ravens have no thought? Do you doubt about your eternal salvation; but have I not guaranteed to save you? Have I not sworn that I will surely deliver every soul that trusts in Me? What have I done to make you doubt Me thus? Wherein have I failed you? Show Me which promise I have broken, to which of My oaths I have been a traitor, or in what case I have turned My back upon My friends? Oh! doubt Me not!’ I wish that I could speak in accents that would give some idea of the tenderness of the way in which My Master would put the question! Methinks if He were here, and showed you His wounds, He would then say to you, ‘Can you distrust Me with

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these tokens of love in My hands, My feet, and My side? Can you doubt Me?' And as He put the question He would make you feel that it stirred an anguish in His soul if it did not in yours. It was a painful question to Him who asked it.

But, in the second place, *it was a needful question for them to hear*, and it is a needful question for us to hear, too. I should like to individualize a little, to hold the looking-glass up before some of you that you might see yourselves.

There are some here who are doubting Christ because they are in temporal trial. You never were in such a sad position as you are in just now. Business seems to go all contrary to your designs. Your flood-tide has suddenly ebbed, and your vessel threatens to be high and dry on a shoal. You have a promise from God that it shall not be, for He has said, 'Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land; and verily thou shalt be fed.' He has said, 'Cast thy burden upon the Lord and He shall sustain thee; He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.' Yet for all that you cannot look it in the face! There is a trouble coming to-morrow. These 'quarter days' trouble many people. Or there is a season of trial coming in a week's time. You have taken it before God in prayer, and yet even after you had prayed over it, and asked God's help, you said to a friend, 'I do not know how I shall ever get through it.' Now, was that right? Was that trusting your heavenly Friend? Has He not helped you afore-

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time? Has He not delivered you in six troubles, and in seven, shall any evil touch you? Come, dear sister, come, dear brother, come at once to the mercy-seat with your burdens, and oh! may God give you faith enough to tell out your case before Him, and you shall then hear Him say, 'As thy days, so shall thy strength be.'

Another person is here whose trouble is not about gold and silver, food and raiment; it is much worse, it is a trouble about his soul. He has lately been overwhelmed with a very terrible temptation, and wherever he goes it haunts him. He tries to run away from it, but he thinks he might as well try to run away from his own shadow. It clings to him; it seems to have fastened upon his hand as the viper did upon Paul, and he cannot shake it off; he is afraid, indeed, that he will never be able to overcome this strong temptation. Have you never read, 'There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above what ye are able, but will, with the temptation, also make a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.'

Then, 'how is it that ye have no faith?' Did not the Lord Jesus teach you to pray, 'Lead us not into temptation?' You have prayed that, and did He not tell you to add, 'But deliver us from evil?' as though, if the first petition were not answered, the second one might come in? You have prayed that, and you believe that God hears

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prayer. How is it, then, that you have no faith to believe He will hear you in this particular case? Beloved, Christ is not a Saviour for some things, but for all things, and He does not come in to help His people some days under some assaults, but under all temptations, and under all trials, He comes to their rescue. Weak as you are He can strengthen you, and fierce though the temptation may be, He can cover you from head to foot with a panoply of proof in which you shall stand right gloriously clad.

The question might just as properly be asked of some Christians in view of service they might render Christ. You do not preach in the street, though you have the ability to do so, but you say you never could stand up to face the crowd. 'How is it that ye have no faith?' You do not teach in the Sabbath-school, though you sometimes think you ought to try it, but you can hardly get courage enough. 'How is it that ye have no faith?' You would like to say a word or two to an ungodly companion, but you are afraid that it would be of no use, and that you would be laughed at. 'How is it that ye have no faith?' Can you not say as Nehemiah did, 'Shall such a man as I flee?' Who are you that you should be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that is crushed before the moth? Be of good courage, and do your Master's will. Has He not most certainly said, 'Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee saith the Lord, and thy

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Redeemer the Holy One of Israel?' You know that these are His words; then 'How is it that ye have no faith?' If we had more faith, dear friends, we should be doing a great deal more, and we should succeed in it; but for want of faith we do not try, and for want of trying we do not perform, and we are little nobodies when we might serve the Master and do much if we had but more faith in Him.

There is another man here who is afraid to die. He has been a Christian for many years, but whenever the thought of death crosses his mind he tries to shake it off. He is a believer in Christ, but he is afraid that he shall not be able to endure the last trying hour. I recollect a sermon which my grandfather once preached, and which was rather a curious one. His text was, 'The God of all grace,' and he finished up all the points by saying that God would give His people all grace, 'but,' said he, at the close of each point, 'There is one kind of grace you do not want.' The refrain came several times over, 'There is one kind of grace you do not want.' I think his hearers were all puzzled, but they received it well enough when he closed by saying, 'And the kind of grace that you do not want is dying grace in living moments, for you only want that when dying time comes.' It may be that, as I am, I could not play the man in death, and yet am I persuaded that the most timorous women here, the most desponding brethren, if they are but resting upon Jesus, will be

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able to sing in death's tremendous hour! Do not be afraid, beloved! There will be extraordinary courage given you when you come into extraordinary trial. Like young Hopeful in the river, you will be able to say to your brother Christian, 'I feel the bottom, and it is good.' There is a good foothold through the river of death, since Jesus Christ has died. Do not trouble yourself about dying if you are already dead with Christ, for His word is sure, 'He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.' Be of good courage, or else, the next time you are in bondage through fear of death I shall venture to propose the question, 'How is it that ye have no faith?'

So might I run through the whole congregation, but perhaps it will be best to conclude the list by saying that this question might often meet us at our closet doors. I hope all of us who profess to be believers in Christ know the power of prayer, for if we do not, we are fearful hypocrites. We have been praying, but, brethren, is it not very possible that after you have been praying you come down from your closet doubting whether you have been heard? You have asked for a certain mercy, but you do not expect it, and the angel might well say, 'How is it that ye have no faith?' You often have not the blessing because you do not believe that God will give you what you ask for, but remember that 'all things are possible to him that

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believeth.' God denies nothing to a fervent heart when it can plead a promise, and lay hold upon Him by the hand of faith. I would that we had in all our churches a growing band of men who could pray! One of the Cæsars had what he called 'a thundering legion,' and these were men who were Christians and could pray. It was said truly that the man who is mighty on his knees is mighty everywhere. If you can conquer God in prayer—and that is to be done, you can certainly conquer your fellow-creatures. If when wrestling with the angel, like Jacob, you can come off victor, you need not be afraid to wrestle with the very devil himself, for you will be more than a match for him through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And now, thirdly, dear friends, I think that *this is a very humiliating question for us to answer*. I do not wish to answer it for you, but I want to propose it to every Christian so that He may answer it himself. But I will help you to answer it.

Can you make a good excuse for your unbelief? I will stand and frankly confess that I cannot find any excuse for mine! This is my history, I will tell it, because I should not wonder if it is very much like yours. I was a stranger to God and to hope. Jesus sought me. His Spirit taught me my need of Him, and I began to cry to Him. No sooner did I cry than He heard me, and at length He said to me, 'Look, poor trembler, look to Me, and I will give you peace.' I did look, and I had peace, a peace which I bless God I have never wholly lost

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these many years. I looked to Him and was lightened, and my face was not ashamed.

Since then He has led me in a very singular path in Providence. My trials have been—not so many as I deserved, but still enough; but as my days my strength has been. There has been in temporals an abundant supply, and in spirituals the fountain has never dried up. In my darkest nights He has been my star; in my brightest days He has been my sun. When my enemies have been too many for me I have left them with Him, and He has put them to the rout. When my burdens have been too heavy for me to carry, I have cast them upon Him, and He never seemed to make much of them, but carried them as some great creature might carry a grain of sand. I have not a word to say against Him, but if He acts to me as He has done, if I could live to be as old as Polycarp and were asked to curse Him, I should have to say with him, as I do say now, ‘How can I curse Him? What have I to say against Him?’ He never broke His promise; He never failed in His Word. He has been to me the best Master that ever a man had, though I have been one of the worst of His servants; He has been true and faithful to every jot and tittle, blessed be His name. If He were to say to me, ‘How is it that ye have no faith?’ I am sure I do not know what I could answer; I could only hide my face and say, ‘My Master, I seem to be almost a devil to think that I cannot believe more firmly in such an one as Thou art—so good, so true,

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so kind.' No, I cannot make an excuse for myself, and I do not suppose that you can make an excuse for yourselves.

I suppose, however, that the real bottom of our want of faith lies in this, that we have low thoughts of God compared with the thoughts of Him we ought to have. We do not think Him to be so mighty, and so good, and so tender as He is. Then, again, we have got very leaky memories. We forget His mighty arm. We forget what He did in days past. Hermon's Mount and Mizar's Hill we pass by, and we let His lovingkindness be forgotten. I am afraid, too, that we rely too much upon ourselves. Was it not Dr. Gordon who, when he lay a-dying, said that the secret of strength in faith in Christ was having no faith in ourselves? I am inclined to think that the secret of weak faith in God is our having a good deal of self-reliance; but when you cannot trust to yourselves, then you hang to Christ, and cling to Him as your only hope, then you give the grip of a sinking man, and there is no hold like that. There is no hold like the hold of one who feels, 'If I do not grip this there is nothing else in all the world.'

' Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on thee.

I am afraid it is our self-confidence that comes in to mar our trust in God. And, besides that, there is our 'evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.' I said the other day, speaking of some

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sad, sad temptation into which a brother had fallen, that I wished the devil were dead, but after awhile I corrected myself, and said, I wished that I were dead myself, for if my own self were dead and gone, and Christ lived in me, I would not mind the devil ; but when the devil and my own self get together they make a sorry mess of it. He might harmlessly bring the sparks if I had not got any tinder, but it is the tinder in me that does the mischief. He might try his hardest to break into my house, if my house were not a poor clay tenement he would never be able to get in. Oh! Lord Jesus, come and live in my heart! Fill it with Thyself and then there can be no room for Satan. Do Thou keep me fast even unto the end.

So here I leave this point with you Christians, only I shall beg to come round in spirit and say to every doubting Christian here, 'How is it that ye have no faith?' I will set you the question of my text for you to answer between now and next Sunday. Give some account of your unbelief, and if you can give a good account for it, pray let us hear it. I never heard any good excuse made for that wicked sinner, Mr. Nobelif. He cannot be put to death, somehow, but I often wish that he could be blown to pieces from the muzzles of the guns of the promises. Oh! that the last rag of him, and the last remnant of him were clean destroyed! John Bunyan, in his Holy War, pictures the citizens of Mansoul going round to pick up the bones of the traitors, and burying them all, till, he says, 'there

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was not the least bone, or rag, or piece of a bone of a traitor left.' Oh! I wish we could get to that state—that there was not the least bone, or rag, or piece of a bone of a doubter left, so that we might sing confidently concerning our God.

This much to the Lord's people.

II. Now, solemnly, and most affectionately, I WOULD SPEAK TO THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER BELIEVED IN CHRIST.

To some of you that head crowned with thorns is no object of reverence. You have never looked up to 'the Man of Sorrows' and felt that 'surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.' It is nothing to you that Jesus should die. Up to this moment you have been a stranger to Him. Now I beg to ask you the question, 'How is it that ye have no faith?' The question is not an impertinent one, but a very natural one. Suffer one who would do you good to press it upon your minds.

Do you not know *that faith makes the Christian happy?* There are Christians here with very small incomes—a very few shillings a week; they are living in the depths of poverty, and yet they would not change places with kings, for they are so happy, because faith makes them rich. There are others of us who have an abundance of this world's goods, and yet we can truly say that we would give them all up if God so willed it, for they are not our gods. Our well-springs of joy come from Christ. Faith makes men happy. 'How is it that ye have no faith?' You squander your substance to get a

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day's amusement. You 'spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not,' but here is something that is bread, and that would satisfy. How is it that ye have it not? Ye working men, ye sons of toil, with little here to make you blessed, 'How is it that ye have no faith?' Faith would make your cottage as blessed as a palace, and a scanty loaf to be better than a stalled ox.

You know, too, that *it is faith which enables the Christian to die well*. You expect to die soon, too. You must soon depart. 'How is it that ye have no faith?' You are like the man who has to cross a river, but has made no provision for it, or who is going a long journey, but takes no money with him, no shoes, no staff, no scrip. How is it that you have nothing to help you to die? Faith it is which conducts the Christian into heaven. 'We sing of the realms of the blest,' and of Canaan's 'Happy land,' but faith is the only passport to the skies, and 'how is it that ye have no faith?' Do you not desire a blessed future? Have you no wish for joys immortal? Does your heart never leap at the thought of the joys that the saints have before the throne? How is it that you let these things slip by, having no faith? 'Without faith it is impossible to please God,' and the faithless will have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire. 'How is it that ye have no faith?' Do you mean to venture into that state of misery? Do you intend to dare the day of judgment without an

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advocate and a friend? You will have to rise again. Though the worms destroy your body, yet in your flesh you will have to see God. The trumpet will be sounding; the angels will be gathering; the judgment-seat will be set, and you will be called to account, and without faith you must be driven from His presence into black despair. Then, 'How is it that ye have no faith?' When I think over these things it does seem to me to be strange that men should be living in utter indifference to Christ and in neglect of divine things! 'How is it?'—can anyone tell us—'How is it that ye have no faith?'

Is it that there are a great many difficult things that you cannot understand? Now, what is it that you are asked to believe? Simply this, that sin was so evil and bitter a thing that God must punish it, and that His own dear Son became a man and suffered for the sins of all those who trust Him, so that those sins may readily be pardoned because Christ suffered the punishment of them. Really, that does not strike me as being a very difficult thing to believe. To trust my soul with the Son of God, bleeding and dying upon Calvary, does not strike me as being in itself a very difficult thing, and if it be difficult it surely must be the hardness of our hearts that makes it so, for there is not beneath the cope of heaven a doctrine more reasonable, which more deserves to be received than this, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, even the chief.

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I do not think that the most of you when you are asked why you have no faith, can reply that it is *because you do not know what you have to believe*. I know that I have tried to make it plain enough as far as my preaching is concerned. If I knew of any words in the English language that would be plainer than any I have used, though they should be so outrageously vulgar that I should be overhauled for using them by all the gentlemen in England, yet I would use them before I left this platform, if I thought I could win one soul by them. The simple truth is that whosoever trusts Christ is saved, and we have tried to put this to you in every shape and form and way that we could think of, so that want of knowledge is not the reason why you have no faith.

I am afraid that in many of you *want of faith is from a want of thought*. Oh! how many of you are mere butterflies! You think about your work, or about your pleasures, but not about your souls. It is not always a bad sign when a man begins to be sceptical. I would sooner he were that than that he were thoughtless, for even to think about spiritual things is, so far, good. Men are often like some bats which when they get on the ground cannot fly, they must get on a stone, and then when they are a little elevated they can move their wings. So, thoughtless men are on the ground and cannot fly, but when God sets them thinking they seem as if they were moving their wings. I pray you, do think about these matters, for certainly

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it must commend itself to every reasonable person that the better part of men ought to be the most thought of. This poor, mortal rag, which is to drop into the grave, ought not to command my highest and most continuous thought, but the immortal principle within me, which will outlive the stars, and be a thing of life and vigour when the sun has shut his burning eye from dim old age—this immortal part of my nature ought certainly to have my most serious and my best regard. If you have been obliged to say that you have no faith because you have not thought, I pray you do think, and may God help you that this thinking may lead you to faith.

But, to close—for our time is gone—the question I have put to you is *a question which I hope will never be asked of you any more*. May this be the last time that any man shall look you in the face and say, ‘How is it that you have no faith?’ In order to make this wish true, however, you must believe now. To believe is to trust Christ Jesus. The Son of the everlasting God takes upon Himself the form of man, and suffers, and He tells us that if we rest on Him, just as I now lean here on this rail with all my weight, He will be better to us than our faith. There never yet was a man who trusted in Christ and found Him a liar. If you trust Christ you shall be saved; nay, you are saved, and the proof of your being saved will be this, that you will not be the same man any longer. All things will become new with you. You will

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be saved from sinning as well as from the guilt of sin. The drunkard shall become sober; the dishonest shall become pure; the mere moralist shall become spiritual, and the enemy of God shall become His friend as soon as he trusts Christ.

‘Loved of my God, for Him again
With love intense I burn.’

I cannot but love Him who has saved me from my sins.

May God bless this question to you, but if it has not been of use to you I hope that it will follow you. I should like to pin it to your backs, but it would be better if we could put it in your hearts. I hope that it will wake you up at night. I trust it may be with you at breakfast to-morrow, and between the intervals of business I hope there will come up a voice from under the counter, or from the back of the workshop—‘How is it that ye have no faith?’ And at night-fall, when you walk alone in the street awhile, may it be almost as though some one had touched you on the shoulder and said, ‘How is it that ye have no faith?’

But, mark you, if this question does not haunt you now, the day will come when, stretched on that lonely bed, when you must bid the world adieu, there may seem, perhaps, to be the form of the preacher who now stands before you—or the ghastly form of Death, who, with bony finger uplifted, shall preach such a sermon to you as your

A Painful and Puzzling Question

very heart, and the marrow of your bones, shall feel, while he says to you, '*How is it? how is it that ye have no faith?*'

Oh! may you never be asked that question again, but now may you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved!

XII

Unreasonable Reasons

'O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?'—
MATT. XIV. 31.

OUR Saviour did not ask Peter that question for His own information. He could have told Peter much more about his unbelieving heart than Peter knew. The Saviour was well acquainted with those springs from which the unbelief of Peter arose. He asked it, therefore, rather, that Peter might make the enquiry of himself—that he might look into the matter and see how groundless his unbelief was, so that on the next occasion he might not fall into the same error. I believe it is a very great cure for unbelief sometimes to look it in the face even while we are under it; and after we have escaped from it, it is still a preventive for the future if we look back upon it and reason concerning it. Remember how David in the forty-second Psalm puts it to himself, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Why art thou disquieted within me?' He was persuaded that the questioning of his unbelief would convict him of its folly. It only

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needs to be looked at closely to lose all its terror, to be robbed of its seeming foundation and to be overcome.

I am afraid that most of us have some time or other in our lives been like sinking Peter, and have cried, 'Lord save me,' not in tones of faith, but in language of unbelief; and if so, it will be as good a thing for us as for Peter to hear the Master say to us to-night, 'Wherefore didst thou doubt? Wherefore didst thou doubt? Was there any good reason for it? Was there any excuse for it? Did any good come of it? Wherefore didst thou doubt?' And I hope, too, that after I have spoken to believers in that way, I may have a word for sinners; only for them I shall have to take liberties with the text and alter it into the present tense, saying, to any who are desirous of peace in Christ, but who tremble and are afraid, 'Wherefore dost thou doubt? Wherefore dost thou doubt? Why dost thou continue in this state of hesitancy and unbelief?'

I. First, then, TO THE CHILD OF GOD, 'WHEREFORE DIDST THOU DOUBT?' Some Christians appear to go from one form of doubt to another. Fears are with them perennial. They are plants that affect the shade; they seldom open their golden cups to drink in the blessed light of the divine sun. Even the strongest believers are, I fear, at times overcome with this disease. As King David, that matchless warrior, once waxed faint, the bravest servants of God, sometimes faint

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even in the day of battle. I will ask them, each one, to look back upon any season of doubtings or faintings, whether they be numerous or few, and I will then say to each one, 'Wherefore didst thou doubt?'

Did you doubt the promise, thinking it was not firm enough? It was a promise to meet your trial; did you distrust it? It is the promise of God; did you think that peradventure it was still fallible and might be broken? It was a promise sent to you by inspired apostles or prophets as the case might be; did you still think it was no better than the word of a man, and might fall to the ground? You have often placed great reliance upon the promises of those you love; could you not rely upon the promise of God? You have found man's promise sometimes true when you have trusted it; were you afraid that God's promise would not be true; or was it that you had met with so many disappointments trusting in an arm of flesh that you thought the Lord to be altogether such as man is? Did you think that He was a man that He would lie, or the son of man that He would repent? Did you forget that Jesus Christ made the promises Yea and Amen in Himself to the glory of God? Was that the reason? If so, how wicked was it to doubt the promise of God! How could we do it? Surely to doubt the veracity of the Most High is a sin of sins.

Did your unbelief assail the promise in itself? Did you think your deliverance a matter of such

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difficulty that omnipotence could not accomplish it? Were you in such want that you supposed the stores of heaven could not supply you? Were you of their mind who said, 'Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?' Or of his who exclaimed, 'If the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?' Did you conceive that anything was too hard for the Lord; that His arm was shortened that He could not save; that His granaries were empty that He could not feed; that the river of God, which is full of water, was dried up? Did you conceive that the munitions wherein you dwelt were no longer munitions of rock, but of crumbling sand? That your bread would not be given you, and that your water would not be sure, because God had failed? Beloved, if that lay at the bottom of your unbelief, was it not a baseless thing indeed? What a slander upon God and upon God's almightiness, to think that He had promised what He could not perform! Whether it was His truthfulness or His power which your unbelief attacked, it was equally a wanton and an unpardonable thing. God will pardon it, I know, but I mean unpardonable to yourself, for surely you must now feel as if you could not forgive yourself for having doubted either the power, or the truthfulness of your God.

Where else did the unbelief lie? *Had you something in your own experience which troubled you?* Was there something which you remembered in the past of failure on God's part? I will ask you,

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though I do not want you to answer to anyone but just to whisper the answer to yourself. Had there been a cause in some dark hour? Had He forsaken you? Had He proved an Ahithophel? Though you had eaten with Him, did He lift up His heel against you? Did He turn a deaf ear to you when you sought Him in the hour of peril? Had He then been false after all? Was there something dark and mysterious to others, which to yourself was made plain by the belief that the Lord had deceived you, that He had utterly failed and changed? Was it so? You repudiate with horror the thought. Then, beloved, 'Wherefore didst thou doubt.' Since already you deny that the promise made you doubt, or that the Promiser was one Whom you had cause to doubt, since also, you must now confess, there was nothing in your experience that could have caused you to doubt, because the past had all been a proof of the faithfulness of God, 'Wherefore then didst thou doubt?'

The child that has always been fed by its father, to whom the father has always been kind, loving, tender, who then doubts without any sort of reason is surely to be blamed. Dear child, what art thou at? Here is a beloved wife, we will say, and for many years she has been the joy of her husband; he has done all for her comfort that she could desire—yes, and often before she has expressed her desire, he has anticipated her wants, and made her life very happy in her confidence in him. And now is she going to doubt him? 'No,' she says, 'I

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would not do him that injustice ; in all my life with him I have had no reason to distrust him, therefore I cannot wantonly throw away my confidence.' Well, child of God, there was never husband so tender to his spouse as thy God has been to thee. There was never one on earth in any relationship that has proved his faithfulness to another as thy Lord, thy Bridegroom has proved His faithfulness to thee. If thou wilt never doubt till thou hast cause to doubt Him, doubting will never trouble thy spirit. But thou hast doubted Him, and the question comes cuttingly to us, under such an aspect, 'Wherefore didst thou doubt?'

Was there something about the experience of others that led you into doubt and fear? We will say that you met with some hoar-head, someone that had long been a pilgrim on the road to heaven, who took you on one side, and holding you as the strange mariner did the wedding guest, told you, 'It is a fiction that God is true, you are a dupe if you trust Him, for I have gone on a pilgrimage, and though it was fair at setting out, I found it foul along the road ; and the promises I relied upon failed me. I came to them as wells in the desert and found them dry. I looked up to them feeling that they were as sure as the sunshine, but they did not warm me. God had forgotten to be gracious, and in His anger He had shut up the bowels of His compassion.' Have you met with such a being? I have seen many of God's people ; my experience and observation have been rather wide, but I have

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never met with one who has come to me to make an *exposé* of his God and say, 'I have been deceived.'

We have seen some of them on their dying beds, and dying men let out tales sometimes, and tell truths unthought of before. They are not able to keep secrets then. I think I have known some of them, honest men, who at such times, close upon the borders of eternity, could not have lied; they were not accustomed to do so at other times, but then I am sure the truth would have been imperative upon them had it not been so before, and they have declared that not one good thing had failed, of all that the Lord God had promised. Their declaration was, that they had found Him faithful and true. In six troubles He had been with them, and in seven He had not forsaken them. Well, then, 'Wherefore didst thou doubt?' If there has been no story told thee by another, and no information from those who have gone farther on the road than thou hast, which should lead thee to distrust thy God, wherefore, oh! wherefore, without any reason or cause whatever, 'Wherefore didst thou doubt?'

Did you doubt because you thought the covenant was an unworthy thing? You know it is ordered in all things and sure. You have learnt from God's Word that it stands fast like the great mountains, and abides like the eternal hills. You are not of those who think that God has entered into covenant with His dear Son, and will run back from it. You do not suspect that a covenant, which has been ratified as the covenant of grace has been,

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will ever come to an end. I am sure you do not. Wherefore then didst thou doubt, when there is a covenant, a divine covenant, ever standing?

Have you forgotten that the covenant was sealed with an oath? God swore, and because He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself. Will you look the fact in the face, that to doubt one promise in the covenant amounts to an accusation of perjury against the Most High. I tremble to think that such guilt may have laid upon my own skirts, and desire to be cleansed from this high crime and misdemeanour of doubting my God. For who can imagine that God can lie when He swears, that after having lifted His hand to heaven and sworn by Himself, He can possibly draw back from a single word which that oath confirms?

Then to make assurance doubly sure, there comes in, over and above the oath, the blood. The blood of victims always ratified the covenant, and the blood of Jesus Christ has ratified the covenant of grace. What! canst thou not trust the bleeding Son of God? His blood is on the promise, and can that promise be a slighted thing never to be redeemed by a 'God of grace? Has He given it, and will He make it to become a dead letter, and suffer His enemies to throw it in His teeth and say, 'He spake, but He did not fulfil; He promised, but He did not perform?' Rather let us say:—

'The gospel bears my spirit up,
A faithful and unchanging God
Lays the foundation for my hope
In oaths and promises and blood.

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‘Wherefore didst thou doubt?’ In the sight of the eternal covenant, ‘Wherefore didst thou doubt?’ In the presence of the incarnate Son of God bleeding on the tree to make every promise sure, ‘Wherefore didst thou doubt?’

Let me ask thee another question. Dost thou remember that dear hour when Jesus first revealed Himself to thee? He led thee into the wilderness and there He spoke to thy heart, and in a moment blotted out thy sins like a cloud. Then thy love to Him was very warm. Thou wentest after Him in the wilderness, forsaking all for His dear sake. In the memory of that early love when He was near to thee, how canst thou doubt Him? Since that time He has helped thee in all difficulties, and borne thee up in all dangers, and has carried thee all the days of old. Wherefore didst thou doubt Him? Thou hast laid thy head upon His bosom, and thou hast broken bread with Him, and dipped in the same dish with Him, and thou hast been as dear to Him as the ewe lamb in Nathan’s parable was to its owner. Thou hast been His darling. Thou hast had chaste fellowship with Him; thou hast been admitted into the secret place of the Most High. There were times when thou couldst tell to others what a dear Saviour and a blessed Lord He has been to thee. Yea, there were high days and holidays to thee, when thy heart did dance at the sound of His name. Wherefore then didst thou doubt? What hast thou found out of Him that led thee into this state of heart? What has He

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done? What hast thou heard of Him that could have brought thee into such a condition, that thou shouldst doubt the Lord thy God?

Now I will suppose some of the answers that might be given to this question of Christ. I hear one say, 'I doubted because *I was in peculiar circumstances*. I hardly think anybody ever was in a condition similar to mine. I felt as if I was made peculiarly the target for the arrows of the Most High. I felt that I was the man that above all others had seen affliction.' Well, but dost thou think that these things were peculiar to God? Mark, He had promised that He would deliver thee and bring thee through; He had said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' Did that promise say, 'except in a peculiar case?' Is there a caveat put at the end of such gracious words? 'There may, however, arise some conditions in which this promise will not stand,' thou sayest. Thou knowest it is not so. That promise, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,' has five negatives in it in the original text, sweeping away altogether all supposition that He could fail thee. How couldst thou say, 'Mine was a peculiar case?' Peculiar as it is, Christ has suffered it:—

'In every pang that rends the heart
The Man of Sorrows had a part.'

Thou hast not gone where Jesus has not gone, nay, the way in which thou hast gone was proper to Him. In all your afflictions He was afflicted, and

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therefore we say, 'Wherefore do you doubt?' It was peculiar to you but not to Him.

'Oh! but,' says another, 'I doubted because *the difficulty was a new one*. It was so strong. I never felt such perplexity; never experienced such a sensation of dismay!' But then your difficulty was not new to Him. Had something happened to thee which God had not foreseen? Didst thou suppose thou wert in a condition in which God never intended thee to be, and did not foreknow thou wouldest be? Hadst thou then outstripped His providence and outrun His love? Hast thou forgotten how the Psalmist puts it? 'If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me.' Why, the Lord knew all about your case of old and provided for it; then, 'Wherefore didst thou doubt?'

'Oh! but,' says one, '*my case was so terribly trying*; it consisted of a series of troubles; it involved such dire calamities and dangers.' Still, what reason was there for doubt about that? Hast thou not heard that God's way is in the whirlwind, that His path is in the sea, and that the clouds are the dust of His feet? If thy way is through the desert, did not He lead His people through a great wilderness, wherein there were fiery serpents and terrible drought? Did He not keep them in their desert march? Wert thou in such a perplexing condition that thou wert worse than the children of Israel in the Red Sea or by the brooks of Arnon?

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Yet He helped them, and why should not He help thee? Surely thy circumstances must have been a small matter with Him who but speaks and it is done, Who wills and it is finished.

‘Ah! but *I labour under such a sense of personal weakness.*’ Just so, dear brother. Is that a novelty? Didst thou not know at the beginning that thou art weakness itself, and that the Eternal God fainteth not, neither is weary. If thou hadst suspected Him of weakness, then there would be a reason for doubting Him, but to find out that thou wast weak was stale news indeed, for thou art weak as water and was always so. Did the matter run thus, that thou wast to fight the battle alone at thine own charges and carry thyself to heaven? Was it not stated in another place that God, Jehovah Jireh, would preserve His people to the end? ‘Wherefore didst thou doubt?’ For a man to say, ‘I doubted because I was weak,’ is simply to give an unreasonable reason for perpetually doubting. If I doubt you, my brother, because of something in myself, that is an absurd thing to do. I can only reasonably doubt you, because of some failure in you; if I doubt because of some weakness in myself, I put the saddle on the wrong horse. I may be led to doubt and despair about myself, that is right enough, it is clear and logical, but to doubt God because I am weak is fantastic and ridiculous. Oh! be rid of that, I pray you.

‘But my doubt,’ says one, ‘arose from another reason. *I lost so many friends one after another.*

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They died or they deserted me.' Well, was thy faith in thy friends? If so, it is little marvel that thy faith was sold. Hast thou learnt that wonderful sixty-second Psalm, which we call the 'only' Psalm, because it has the word 'only' ever so many times, beginning with it indeed, though our translation has it, '*Truly* my soul waiteth upon God.' You know how it says, 'My soul, wait thou *only* upon God, for my expectation is from Him.' If you built your hope on God alone, and He was the one pillow, what if God's providence knocked away all these useless buttresses of your own, it could make no difference to the real strength of your faith. If a man trusts in God *and* his friends, he hath no secure trust; he is like one that has one foot upon the rock and another on the quicksand. Betwixt two stools, we know what comes, even though the two stools be good ones. To trust in God and to trust in friends is poor trusting. O beloved, if our faith was what it should be, it would lean upon the Lord alone, so that if we had none left to comfort us, we should still be able to say, 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.' There is no reason to doubt God because friends fail.

'Still I must say,' adds another, 'that *I was so tossed to and fro, that I could not see my way.*' Oh! that was the reason, was it? I heard it said the other day, when I wanted to know a man's character, and asked whether I could trust him, 'Yes, you can trust him as far as you can see him,'

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and I knew what was meant by that. And is that what you mean about your God? that you can trust Him only as far as you can see Him? Oh, shame! Shame! Shame! And yet I am afraid that the rebuke might come home to many of us. We want to see how He will deliver us before we rely upon God. Now, of all the questions that ought to be banished from the lips of a reasonable man, that should be silenced soonest, when we have to deal with an Almighty God. What have I to do with *how* God will deliver? He will do it somehow and that is enough; He will do it in the best manner; He will do it in the wisest manner; He will do it in the manner that will bring the most glory to His name, and, in the end, most profit to His people. Therefore, let us be content to know that it will be so, and not ask, 'How,' and begin to question the Eternal God, 'Wherefore didst thou doubt?'

I will put it in this way, beloved. *Did any of you ever get any good through doubting?* Did you ever prosper because of it? Did doubt ever calm a sorrow? Did it ever allay a fear? Did that handkerchief ever wipe tears from your eyes? Did you ever find your distrust a staff to lean upon? Did your doubts improve your circumstances? When you have had suspicions of your God, have they ever filled your purse or put bread upon your table? If the rain was about to spoil your crops, did your doubts and fears bring fine weather? If the skies were unpropitious and you needed

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rain, did your distrust ever make the clouds burst with showers? Oh! you cannot say that it was ever so.

I will put it on the other hand, *Did your doubts ever glorify God?* Did you ever influence a sinner in the right way by distrusting God? Did you ever bring to Jesus Christ the slightest honour by pouring suspicion on His love? Has it not been all the other way? Do not you think you often grieve the Holy Spirit by doubting? Do not you think it very likely that Christ has taken it hard that His beloved should doubt Him? I do not know anything that would cut me to the quick more than to be suspected and not believed by those I love. We may go outside into the market and make a statement, and, if persons are suspicious, we are not surprised; but within the boundary of our own house, if our child or our wife should not be able to trust us, there would be an end to all the joys of the family.

Oh! how Christ's heart must be pierced when those He died for doubt Him; when those He has helped and succoured, blessed and caressed, made to sit under His shadow and eat of His fruit, yet in the day of trial, look somewhere else for help, run to broken cisterns that hold no water, and will not come to Him the fountain of living waters! This is what in the Old Testament He calls playing the harlot, and though the term be harsh, yet, since it is so constantly used in Scripture, I cannot help referring to it. He calls this sin a want of spiritual

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chastity to Himself. It is a departure into a mental adultery, when the soul goes gadding abroad to this and that person or thing for comfort, instead of keeping to her Lord. Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and let thy soul be always ravished with His love, let Him be as the loving hind and as the pleasant roe to thee, but go not abroad after other lovers, for if thou do so, they will be a mockery to thee, and drive thee back one day with bitter taunts. Thou wilt be compelled at length to say, 'I will go and return unto my first husband, for then it was better with me than now.' Beloved, Jesus deserves our trust, let us give it to Him.

Our doubts and fears have often prevented Him showing us more of Himself. He has said, 'I have told you these earthly things that were in My kingdom, and you believe Me not; how shall you believe if I tell you of heavenly things.' Our dear Lord has many things to say unto us, but we cannot bear them yet because we are so unbelieving. But if we got more faith and rested like little children upon Him, He would tell us more and show us more. We might have been a long way farther on the road if we had not been hindered by unbelief. Of how many places might it not be said, 'He could not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief?' Unbelief seems to hamper omnipotence, to tie the hands of the Almighty. We do not know what losers we have been by our unbelief. God grant, then, that as we turn this

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question over, it may breed repentance in our spirits, and as we find how impossible it is to answer it, we may go and say, 'Lord, we have no excuse to make; only give us more of Thy Spirit; we believe; help Thou our unbelief.'

II. Now a few minutes may be spent in speaking, secondly, TO THOSE WHO DESIRE TO BELIEVE IN JESUS, BUT FEEL THEY CANNOT. To such, as I have already said, the question must be slightly altered. I will ask, 'Wherefore dost thou doubt?'

There once came into this place a young man, who is now a minister of the Gospel, and he has told us how he became converted to God. He sat over in the gallery yonder, in great distress of mind, because he could not feel his sins enough. On that particular occasion I said, 'There is over in the gallery yonder a young man who feels that he is too great a sinner to be saved, therefore he does not believe in Jesus.' 'Ah!' my friend said, 'I thought to myself, I wish I was like that young man, I should like to feel the greatness of my sin.' But then in my sermon I went on to say, 'There is another young man in that gallery who would give his eyes to feel as the other one feels. They are a pair of fools,' I said; 'the one for believing that he is too great a sinner for an omnipotent Saviour to forgive, and the other for imagining that Christ wants his strength of feeling to fit him for salvation—as if Jesus could not save him after all.'

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If one is saying, '*I cannot be saved because of the greatness of my sins,*' thou givest God the lie in the same manner, for it is written, 'All manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men;' and there is that grand text, 'The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.' 'He is able also to save them unto the uttermost that come unto God by Him,' and He is able to save them now. There is no reason for your doubting, for every sin that it is possible for you to commit is possible for Christ to forgive.

But the other says, 'My trouble is not that I feel I am a great sinner, but that *I do not feel I am a great sinner.*' The notion has been entertained by some that there is a certain amount of feeling required before we are fit for Christ, and a good deal of preaching has gone to show that the sinner is to fit himself for Christ. I have read descriptions of the sinner's fitness, that really were things that were true enough about those who were saved, but were most discouraging and ungospel-like, if they had reference to those who were not saved. Jesus Christ is come to seek and to save that which was lost. If you are lost, He has come to save you. It is not those that feel they are lost, there are special promises for them; but those who are so lost that they do not even feel it. He even comes to give a sense of being lost to those who have no sense of it, and mark you, if Jesus waited till sinners felt their need of Him, of themselves, He would never save one. It is as much His work to make

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us feel our need as it is to supply our need, and Hart has well put it :—

‘True belief and true repentance,
Every grace that brings us nigh,
Without money,
Come to Jesus Christ and buy.’

If you cannot come with a broken heart, come for a broken heart. If you are all bad, and there is no good about you, not even a good feeling, yet still the gospel calls to you and to every creature under heaven, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.’ ‘Still I must feel,’ says one. Yes, you shall feel, and feel as you never felt before, if you listen to this. ‘Hear, and your soul shall live. Incline your ear and come unto Me. Hear and your soul shall live.’ Believe in the crucified Saviour. Trust yourself with Him, for neither is there salvation in any other. Salvation is not in your feelings, but in His work; not in looking at the bites of the serpent, but in looking at the brazen serpent on the pole; not in studying thy leprosy, but in looking to the priest, who puts His hand on thee and says, ‘I will, be thou clean’; not in poring over thy blindness, but in lifting up thy face to Him who puts his finger on thy sightless eyeballs and says, ‘See, for I have given thee sight’; not in trying to untwist the grave-clothes, but in obeying that glorious voice that says, ‘Lazarus come forth,’ even to one that has laid three days in his grave already. It is not thou that art to do the saving, it is Christ that is the Saviour.

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If you have any reason for doubting Christ then doubt Him. But how can you doubt Him? Is He not able to save? He is the Son of God. Believest thou this? Did He not die the just for the unjust to bring us to God. Dost thou doubt the efficacy of His death? Canst thou stand at the foot of the cross and hear Him cry, 'It is finished,' and then say, 'There is not enough for me'? Dost thou think that to be incomplete which He says is finished? And when He has entered into His Father's glory and sat down because He hath for ever completed the work of atonement, wouldest thou rouse Him up? Wouldest thou take Him away from His rest and say, 'Thou hast not finished the work, it is still incomplete.' Oh! say not so. If thou shouldest entertain such a thought thy unbelief would be reckless indeed.

To me (I speak it as in the Lord's sight) it seems this day as if I *must* trust Jesus, and as if, racking my invention and troubling my brain, *I cannot think of a reason for doubting the Son of God.* Yet was I once as plentiful in doubts and fears as thou art, poor sinner. I quibbled with Him about this and I quibbled with Him about that, and all the answer He gave me, was, to show me Himself and to say, 'Look unto Me, and be ye saved all ye ends of the earth.' I wanted some ceremony, or some dream, or some strange feeling, or some revelation—I know not what I wanted; but this I know, that I stood quibbling and quibbling still, till I doubt not I should have quibbled myself into hell, and

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committed suicide in the presence of my Saviour, if at last I had not felt too wretched to continue in such a miserable business, and I just allowed myself to faint away into the arms of the Saviour and to wake up saved. I gave up my quibbles, I gave up my good works, such as they were, wretched things! I gave up reliance upon feelings and reliance on prayer, and came to rely only upon Him. And now, at this day, if He cannot save a poor sinner, I shall be damned, and if there is anything wanted to save a soul except the precious blood and perfect righteousness of Jesus, I must be lost. Sinner, you have as much to trust in as I have, for I have not anything. I have not the weight of a grain of dust of merit of my own; I have not a rag; I have not a thread left of anything I can rely upon, except that dear Lord whom God has set forth to be 'the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.' Wherefore then dost thou doubt?

Are God's words after all false? Does He say, 'Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price;' and does He mean to shut the door in your face when you do come? Does He say, 'Whosoever will let Him take the water of life freely,' and when you come, will He say to you, 'I refuse you; I did not mean you'? Dost thou think that God's invitations are, after all, a hideous laugh, a supreme mockery at the woes of

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men? It cannot be! When He says, 'Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved,' is it true or not? When He says, 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,' is it true or not? When he says, 'Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon,' is it true or not? If it be true, wherefore dost thou doubt? Wilt thou make God a liar? Thou wilt do so if thou dost not trust His promise.

Once more, O sinner, *to what end and purpose did Jesus come into the world* to bleed and die, if after all there is no forgiveness for sinners, and if those that seek His face will be rejected? When men make a mock of others, they do not often do it at vast expense. Dost thou think God has hung His Son upon the tree for mockery? That He has pierced Him with death-smarts, and all to laugh at sinners? 'Ah! but I am such a great sinner.' And dost thou think that Christ came into the world to be a little Saviour to little sinners? Is He a Physician that can only heal finger-ends? Dost thou think that? He is the Son of God, and sin seems to vanish in His august presence. When I look at the needs of this city of London, and see how many people there are, I am ready to say, How shall they all be fed? Where shall there be flocks and herds to supply them? But if I go to the great markets in the early morning and see the meat and food there, I change my mind and say,

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‘Wherever can there be people enough to eat all this?’ So, when I look at a sinner’s sin, I say, ‘How can this ever be washed away?’ But when I look at the Saviour’s blood I seem to say, ‘Sin is readily enough put away by such a fountain as this!’ I change my voice, and whereas I thought sin too great to be atoned for, I come to think the atonement almost too great for human sin, if such might be. I cannot conceive it possible that God will find any difficulty in forgiving sin after such an atonement is made. ‘Wherefore dost thou doubt?’

Now, I will give you two great reasons for doubting and then I have done.

The first time I can recommend any sinner to doubt the Saviour, is when he finds a fellow-sinner that has been to Jesus and has rested in Him and has perished. Now, set you out upon this journey. Ask all God’s people one by one and see if God has rejected them. Look at those you knew, who were like yourself, perhaps they were drunkards, perhaps they were swearers. Now that they have sought the Lord, see whether He has refused them. When you find He has rejected one, then you will have reason to think He will reject you. Then you may reasonably doubt.

The other reason is this. Try Him yourself, and if He rejects you, then you shall have cause for doubting. Go and throw yourself at his door of mercy with this upon your heart, ‘I will perish here if I must perish.’ Go to His cross and look up and

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say, 'Saviour, Redeemer, Son of God, bleeding and dying, a guilty soul here comes and trusts itself with Thee.' See if He will spurn you! See if you are not saved! I challenge the whole earth, I challenge all hell to find a single soul of woman born that ever came and humbly rested on the blood and righteousness of Christ and yet was lost. Such a thing has never been and never shall be while the earth abideth.

O poor soul, then come away—come away to the Saviour. I will go with you, for I love to go again and again and again, and be a beggar again at my Lord's door. Come, let us say together, 'Jesus, we have guilt; we have no merit; we have no claim upon Thee; we deserve to be cast into the lowest hell; but, by Thy blood, by Thy righteousness, have mercy upon us and save us *now*. We desire to give up all our sins, to leave them behind us, and to be obedient to all Thy bidding. Save us, dear Saviour, save us. Purge us with hyssop and we shall be clean; wash us and we shall be whiter than snow.' If that prayer comes from any heart here, the Lord will answer it indeed. May He bless you! Amen.

XIII

Faith Hand in Hand with Fear

'What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee.' PSALM lvi. 3.

IT must be a very difficult thing to be the first traveller through an unknown country, but it is a much more simple matter to travel where others have preceded us; however difficult may be the road, we discover our path by certain marks which they have left for us, and as we turn to the record of their journey, we say, 'Yes, here they came to a forest, here is the forest; here they spoke of a broad river, there they forded it; here is exactly the spot which is marked, we are in the right road, for we are following in the track of those who have gone before.' Now God in His providence has placed us in the ends of the earth as to time; a long caravan of pilgrims has preceded, and they have left us marks on the way and records of their journey.

A notable of the pilgrims to the skies was David, for his pilgrimage was so singularly varied. Some travel to heaven, but it is sunshine almost all the

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way there. And some on the other hand seem to have storms from beginning to end. But David's case differed from these, he had both the storm and sunshine. No man had braver weather than the King of Jerusalem, and no man ever ploughed his way through soil that was more deep with mire, nor through an atmosphere more loaded with tempest than did this man of many tribulations. He has been a kind of pioneer for us. I remember seeing, some years ago, the French Army going through Paris, and noticing some of the big, tall fellows, old men that had been in the wars of the first Napoleon. These went in front, and they seemed to be worth all the rest that were behind—they were the pioneers that cleared the way for the others. Now David, and such as these we read of in the Scriptures, are just the grand old soldiers that bear the standard and lead the way, and we are the raw recruits that come on behind them. Be thankful that we have some veterans to lead the van.

Now our text is rather an extraordinary one. Yet it represents the experience of many of us, and we are comforted by the thought that our feelings and David's have very much agreed. 'What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee.'

You notice in the text, first, *a complex condition*. Here is a man afraid, and yet he is trusting. Well, then, we look at *the natural side* of this, 'I am afraid.' And then we look at *the gracious side*, 'I will trust in Thee.'

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I. Notice, first, then, that here is David in A COMPLEX CONDITION. He says, 'I am afraid,' and with the same breath he says, 'I will trust in Thee.' Is not this a contradiction? It looks like a paradox. Paradox it may be, but contradiction it is not. What strange creatures we are! I suppose every man is a trinity, certainly every Christian man is—spirit, soul and body—and we may be in three states at once, and we may not know which of the three is the real state. The whole three may be so mixed up that we become a puzzle to ourselves. Though certain mental philosophers would say that I egregiously err in asserting that such a thing can be, yet nevertheless I am quite certain that it is a very common experience of the child of God.

It is even quite possible for us to find two minds and two wills—two sets of faculties within ourselves clashing and jarring and warring and contending with one another. In a record of some very notable experiences of doctors who attend upon the insane, there is a very singular case described of a man who was sane always regularly one day, as clear in the intellect and intelligent in judgment as any man; the next day he was always insane. On the day on which he was sane he used to talk about how the doctor ought to treat him to-morrow, and to express his surprise that he entered into such a state, reasoning in the most practical manner. He seemed to be two men. There is a record of another case even more

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remarkable, of a man who would act and speak and think as an intelligent full-grown person, but after sleeping two or three days he would wake up a child, to learn like a child, to talk like a child, to speak like a child, and to all intents and purposes to lead the life of a child. Then he would fall asleep again and wake up as an adult person. To us it seems a most marvellous thing that this should happen, but perhaps it is even more marvellous to find ourselves perfectly sane with no mental malady upon us, and yet at the same moment the subject of two sets of feelings—afraid and yet trusting.

I am sure that every Christian here will follow me while, for a moment, I speak upon this singular duplex condition of *Christian experience*. You remember how the women returned from the sepulchre. They had seen a vision of angels, they had also seen the Lord, and it is said they returned with fear and with exceeding great joy—very fearful, trembling at what they had seen, but very joyful—never so fearful, and yet never so joyful before. And you remember the disciples when the Lord Jesus stood in their midst. ‘They believed not for joy.’ Extraordinary thing! They did believe or they could not have had the joy, and yet the joy seemed, when it grew out of the belief, to cut away its own roots, and ‘They believed not for joy.’ Strange, marvellous state of mind, yet common to the Christian.

The same thing is true as to *our attitude to sin*. Have you not found yourself, beloved believer in

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Jesus Christ, drawn towards an evil thing for a moment, fascinated by it, finding a tendency in the carnal corruption of your nature to go after evil, and yet at the very same time you hated yourself that you should give way even for a moment to a thought so vile. You have felt the struggle to go after sin, but yet another self, as it were, struggled with greater force not to go after it. One faculty seemed to say, 'How sweet that sin would be,' and yet you have said, 'It is gall and bitterness itself.' The flesh has loved it, but the spirit has said, 'I abominate it, I loathe it,' and has cried out to God to prevent the possibility of our being allowed to indulge ourselves in it. Yet thus warring and contending with us, the prince of the power of the air uniting with our own evil nature, has endeavoured to drag us down, while the Holy Ghost, co-working with the incorruptible seed which he has implanted in us, has sought to draw us upwards towards holiness, purity and perfection. It is a wondrous warfare which only the elect of God do understand.

So, too, you have been the subject of another phase of this same phenomena *in reference to faith*. You have seen a precious promise or a glorious doctrine; you have believed it because you have found it in God's Word. You have believed it so as to grasp it, and feel it to be your own, yet, perhaps, almost at the same time certain rationalistic thoughts have come into your mind, you have been vexed with doubt as to whether

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the promise is true. You remember, perhaps, the insinuations of others, or something rises up out of your own carnal reason that renders it difficult for you to believe, while at the same time you are believing. You battle with yourself, one self seems to say, 'Is it so?' and yet your inner self seems to say, 'I could die for it, I know it is so.' You are tormented because you cannot answer certain arguments against it, but yet at the same time you feel you have answered them, and they are no arguments at all. Your heart repels all attacks upon the truth, and yet somehow or other, for a while, you are staggered by the assault which Satan has made upon you.

I might go on to mention many other ways in which these two states of mind will come. I have found it frequently so *in prayer* when I have sought to draw near to God. An idle worldly spirit will bring ten thousand distracting thoughts to bear upon the soul, and the heart will seem to say, 'I cannot pray just now, I have other things to do, I must think of them.' What is worse, the mind will persist in thinking of these things, and they will come crowding in; some work that you have to do, perhaps some friend that you have to call upon, something you have forgotten—these things will come pouring in upon you as if in your own heart you said, 'I do not want to pray.' Yet at that very same time you have felt a craving, an insatiable longing, to draw near to God in prayer, and you have felt 'I must pray, I cannot live

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without it, I must now have a period of fellowship with God, cost me what it may.' These two things will be there, the praying and the unpraying, the faithless and the believing struggling one with another, and your poor spirit will be like ground that is trampled upon by two armies that are fiercely contending as to which shall get the mastery. You see that in David's case, when in the text he says, 'I am afraid, yet will I trust in Thee.' There is a complex condition.

II. Let us look at THE NATURAL SIDE OF IT. David says, 'I am afraid.' Admire his honesty. Some men would never own they were afraid; they would have blustered and said they cared for nothing; generally there is no greater coward in this world than the man who never will own that he is afraid. But this hero of a thousand conflicts, this brave scion of the sons of men, honestly says, 'I am afraid.' Why afraid?

Because he was but a man, and we men cannot rule the elements, we cannot overcome those who are mightier than ourselves. 'They be many that fight against me, O Thou Most High,' he cries; and then he adds, 'I am afraid.' We cannot expect, therefore, that we should be free from fear when powers greater than our own are set against us. We are afraid because at the very best we are but weak and feeble men.

He was afraid, again, *because he was a sinful man*. It is this that makes cowards of us more

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than anything else. We know we deserve the rod of our Father, and though by faith we feel that He will never use the sword of justice against us, yet we are often afraid that the correcting rod will be brought out and we shall be chastened sore. Well, then, while we are men and sinful men, no wonder that we should be afraid.

Besides, David was something more than that; he was afraid *because he was an intelligent man*. He knew his position, and could rightly estimate its risks. Now, with some persons, bravery arises from utter ignorance; they do not know the danger, and therefore do not fear it. The unsaved sinner, if he did but know where he is, would not be as quiet as he is. Unconverted men and women, if they did but know who and what and where they are, if they did but remember that God is angry with the wicked every day, would be very ill at ease; they would be full of alarm and terror. But the Christian knows his position, he is not blind, his eyes have been opened, he has been brought to the light, he does not shut his eyes to the strength of his spiritual adversaries, nor to his own internal weakness, nor to the awful guilt of sin. He sees all these, and therefore it is not to be wondered at that with so much of intelligence, as a Christian man he should have some misgivings. 'I am afraid,' saith he.

And then he is afraid again *because he is no stoic*. The heathen tried as far as they could to

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turn flesh into iron and harden their hearts into steel, but such is never the process through which the Christian passes. The Christian, when his sinews are most braced and he is most heroic for his Master, is still as tender and as sensitive as a little child. The grace of God does not take away from us feminine tenderness, though it gives to us masculine courage; in fact, it blends the two in a perfect man, putting strength and sympathy together, and making us like to Christ who, with all the force of the majesty of His determination and His courage, had all the tenderness and gentleness that the fondest love could bring. Therefore we are afraid, because we do not boast of the insensibility of the Red Indian, but we still strive to be gentle and tender-hearted. The grace of God keeps us so.

But when is it that the saint should expect to be most afraid? Is it not when enemies around him are many? The Psalmist, therefore, is afraid *because he is compassed by foes*. The Christian man does not like having enemies; if he could help it he would not have a single one. He never willingly makes an enemy, and if he could destroy his enemies by turning them into friends, he would be delighted to achieve so great a victory. When, therefore, he sees that he has many enemies, and these are very cruel and very determined, then he is afraid.

We are afraid, sometimes, when we think of the old enemy, our spiritual enemy, for we know his

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cunning. He has been so long tempting the saints that he knows his business well. We know what poor birds we are when he is the fowler, how soon we are taken in his net, and therefore at the prospect of being tempted again by him we bow our knee to our great Father, and we cry, 'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' We are afraid at the thought of having to fight Satan. Who that has read John Bunyan's description of Christian fighting Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation but will feel afraid at the prospect of such a fight as that?

The man of God may be afraid, too, *because he sees want surrounding him*. The Christian must eat and drink, and, though he is not to make this the question of his life, yet he cannot look upon his little ones and think that he will not have bread for their mouths without being somewhat afraid. The natural side of the question must come up. He is not so hardened that he does not feel it, and when he sees want staring him in the face, for his own sake and for the sake of those about him, he is afraid.

If, in addition to all this there comes upon him the remembrance of past sin, and with especial vividness some transgression into which he has lately fallen, he is afraid *because of the memory of the past*. Though he may look to Jesus, and he will do so, though he may see the sin laid on Christ, yet even while he is looking, he will often be amazed with a sore amazement, and an agony of soul will

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come over him, not so much the fear of being cast away, if, indeed, he be a child of God, but a fear lest after all he should turn out not to be what he hoped he was. If you never are afraid about your souls, I am afraid for you. If you never had a fear about your state I think I may remind you of Cowper's lines :—

‘He that never doubteth of his state,
He may, perhaps, he may—too late.’

Under a sense of sin it is but natural, nay, I will add, it is but right, that a trembling should come over the soul, and we should fall down in the presence of God humbled before Him.

The like is the case, too, with the man who is afraid *because of the thought of approaching death*. We have seen some, when they have come actually to die, rejoicing with joy unspeakable, and it has strengthened our faith when we have heard their bold declarations as they have felt the Master's presence in the final hour. But if, as a rule, you and I can think of death without any kind of fear, if no tremor ever crosses our minds, well, then, we must have marvellously strong faith, and I can only pray we may be retained in that strength of faith. For the most part there is such a thing as terror in prospect of death; the fear is often greater in prospect than in reality, in fact, it is ever so in the case of the Christian. But yet when we give ourselves up to fear for a time we are grievously afraid. This, then, is the natural side of the

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question. A man may be a true believer, he may be a very David, and yet be afraid.

III. Now take THE GRACIOUS SIDE OF IT. 'What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee.' 'Trust in Thee!' How glorious is this. It is not the expression of nature, *it is a sign of grace*. No man trusteth God unless there has been a divine work upon his soul—at least, no man who is afraid can trust in God unless the Lord has taught his timorous spirit to fly like a dove to the sure dovecot cleft by divine grace in the Rock of Ages. Happy soul that has been taught the art and mystery of believing! It is the highest and noblest of all the practical sciences; God grant us grace what time we are afraid to exercise ourselves in it.

It is a sure sign of grace when a man can trust in his God, for the natural man, when afraid, falls back on some human trust, or he thinks that he will be able to laugh at the occasion of fear. He gives himself up to jollity and forgetfulness, or perhaps he strings himself up with natural resolution, takes arms against a sea of troubles and hopes by opposing to end them. He goes anywhere but to his God. Only the gracious spirit, only the soul renewed by the Holy Ghost will say, 'What time I am afraid,' my one and only resort shall be this, 'I will trust in Thee.' The thoughtless, as I have said, try to laugh off their fears; the naturally thoughtful try to invent some scheme by which they may pass through the difficulty; but he who is believing leaves schemes and frivolities alike, and

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applies to his God with the burden of his care, and finds from Him an instantaneous and effectual relief.

And after all *is not it the most reasonable thing* in the world that a soul that is afraid should trust in God? Where can there be a firmer ground of reliance than in Him whose power never can be defeated, whose wisdom is never at a nonplus? If I have God's promise that He will help me, to whom or whither should I go but unto God that has so promised? If in addition He has given me His oath, 'that by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, I might have strong consolation,' where shall my timid spirit go but to the shadow of the wings of the God of covenant Who, by promise and by oath, has guaranteed my safety? What are my circumstances? Hath He not given me a promise suitable to them, a special promise for each special time? And so I need never be afraid of my circumstances. Has He not, indeed, given me one promise which covers them all with its broad expanse? That 'all things work together for good to them that love God; to them who are the called according to His purpose.' With a God who is Almighty and eternally faithful, with a God who promises and seals the promise with His oath that He will help me when I call upon Him, what more reasonable than that when I am afraid I should come and put my trust in Him.'

Ah! my brethren, if it be reasonable, *it certainly*

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proves itself to be most effectual, for he that trembles from head to foot does but begin to trust in God, and behold! he grows calm. Have we not seen minds so distracted as to be almost bereft of reason grow quiet and peaceful when they have learnt to do the work they could do, and then leave the rest to God. Oh! it is sweet waiting at the posts of Jehovah's door. It is well to tarry till His promise comes to be ripe, and then in all its sweetness drops into our hands. 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,' so hath He declared. My soul lay hold upon that, and next time thou art afraid, seek a shelter beneath that promise, 'No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.' When I am afraid lest I should want I will come and get beneath that promise. If it be a good thing, God has bound Himself by His Word to give it to me. 'Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.' My God, when another time I am full of alarm and dismay, I will come to Thee, for Thou art bound to strengthen and to help and to uphold thy servants who place their confidence in Thee.

Dear brethren and sisters, let me exhort you—(and may God's Holy Spirit back up the exhortation!)—to the exercise of a holy trust in God, not when you are happy only, but when you are afraid. *It is a seasonable thing* as well as a reasonable one. Fruit is always best in its season, and the time of

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faith is the time of trial. Faith is never so full-flavoured as when it is produced beneath cloudy skies. Other fruits need the sun to ripen them, but this is one of the precious fruits put forth by the moon. You shall, when your experience is most bitter, honour God the most if you can then trust Him. Sure, it is no faith that believes in providence when the purse is full. What faith is it that believes in the merits of the precious blood when it feels its own sanctification to be complete, if such can be the case? What faith is that which leans on the Beloved when it can stand alone? But that is faith which, when it cannot stand in itself and knows it—sees death written upon all its own power, almost sees all its hopes withered and blasted with the east wind—yet cries, ‘My God, it is enough! My soul waiteth only upon Thee. My expectation is from Thee.’ This is to honour God indeed.

Observe the gradation there often is in Christian experience. You will sometimes find believers in so low a state that their heart is all fear. By-and-bye they believe, they are enabled to exercise the faith that God has given them, then it is fear and trust. But they do not stop there, they get a little further, and as David did in this Psalm, if you will turn a verse or two further on, it gets to be trust and no fear. ‘In God have I put my trust; I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.’ May you climb the steps of that gracious ladder; may you, with your fear, have faith, and then

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afterwards have your faith without any fear ! When faith gets strong enough fears are expelled.

Let me, however, return to my point, that when you are afraid then is the time to trust the Lord. If you are very poor, then is the time to believe the doctrine of providence. If you feel your sins, then is the time to lay hold on Jesus Christ and to wash in the fountain. Who cares to wash when he is clean ? The time to wash is when the filth is felt ; then fly to all cleansing blood. You say, ' I feel so dead and cold, I have not the spiritual vivacity and warmth and life that I used to possess. I used to come up to the Tabernacle and feel such joy and rejoicing in worshipping on God's day, but now I feel flat and dull.' Oh ! but do not be tempted to get away from Christ because of this. Who runs away from the fire because he is cold ? Who, in summer, runs away from the cooling brook because he is hot ? Should not my deadness be the reason why I should come to Jesus Christ ? Now is His time for Him to show His power. Now my Master, if indeed Thou be a friend that sticketh closer than a brother, and, blessed be Thy name, Thou art such a friend, behold ! here is one of Thy friends ; prove that Thou canst forgive and still stick to him. Cause him to trust in Thee, and let him find Thee better than all his fears.

I have done when I have made application of my text to those of you who have not believed in Jesus and yet desire to do so. I know your fears, your doubts, your tremblings. May I whisper in your

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ear this word, 'Now that you are afraid put your trust in Jesus?' Christ came to save sinners such as you are with all your fear. Now, while the fears toss you, go to Jesus

'While the raging billows roll,
While the tempest still is high.'

Hang all your weight upon the Lover of Souls. Do not wait till you get rid of your fears and then go to Him. Go now. Go now.

A person was once walking in a field and a bird flew right into her bosom. She wondered why the little lark came nestling there, but looking up she saw a hawk in the air; it had pursued the little bird, which, though it would have been quite afraid at any other time to find a shelter where it did find it, had by the greater fear of its enemy been driven out of the lesser fear. She to whom it fled for refuge cared for it, cherished it and set it free. So be it with thee. Let thy great fears of hell overcome that fear that thou hast sometimes had, that perhaps Jesus may reject thee. Fly into His bosom. 'Oh! but I fear me He will reject me.' Well, then, I trust in God that your other fears will get so great as to overcome this fear. John Bunyan says that his fear of hell at last became so terrible that if Jesus Christ had stood with a naked sword in His hand, or if He had held a pike to him, he would have run on the point of the pike, and would always rather go to an angry Christ than be cast into hell. But, believe me, Christ is not angry. He

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holds no pike and no sword in His hand. This is His word, 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.'

Aged sinner, you that have been a great transgressor, whoever you may be, if you come and simply cast yourself upon the blessed Saviour who on the cross offered up Himself for human guilt, you shall be saved. 'What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee.' I dare to say these ancient words to-night from the depths of my soul. I am afraid of my sins; I am afraid of my unworthiness. I never live a day but what I see reason to be afraid. If I had to stand in myself I should be afraid to stand before God. If I had never done anything in my life but preach this one sermon, there have been so many imperfections and faults in it that I am afraid; but, my Lord Jesus, Thou art my soul's only hope. I trust entirely in Thee.

Beloved, have this same faith. May God work it in you, and then your fear shall only drive you closer to your Lord, and so the fear and the faith shall go on hand in hand together for a while, till at last perfect love shall come in and take the place of fear, and then faith and love shall go hand in hand to heaven.

May the Lord bless you, every one of you, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

XIV

Faith's Way of Approach

'So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.'—ROMANS x. 17.

ACCORDING to the Christian religion faith is the great essential thing. 'Without faith it is impossible to please God.' Whatever we may do or may be we cannot be acceptable with the Most High unless we believe in Him. Even prayer can only be a mockery if it be not the prayer of faith. 'He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him,' or else he does not really pray. The Lord Jesus Christ has died to save men; but it is certain that no man will be saved without faith. Even the blood of Jesus Christ does not save any except those who believe in it. 'God so loved the world' is a very wide expression, but we must not make it wider than Scripture makes it, for remember how the verse goes on: 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whosoever believeth in Him* should not perish, but have ever-

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lasting life.' Without faith Christ is not ours. His blood cannot cleanse us ; His life cannot quicken us. We must have faith to get at the blessings of salvation.

Suppose we could be brought into touch with Christ without faith for a while, yet if we had not continuous faith we should not have a continued connection with the Saviour, and consequently should not abide in life eternal ; for it is written, ' The just shall live by faith.' They not only begin to live by faith, but continue to live in the same manner. In our holy religion everything is by faith—faith for life and faith for death. Even the first tears of repentance must be salted with faith, and the last song on earth shall be full of faith.

Ye must have faith or ye must perish. ' He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned,' is the declaration of Jesus Christ the Saviour Himself.

I. LET US DISCOVER WHAT FAITH IS. We have seen it is essential ; it is very important to understand its nature. Well, *faith with regard to God is the same as faith with regard to anything else.* It is the same act of the mind, though it differs as to its object. When I believe in God it is the same kind of mental act as when I believe in my friend. I believe with the same mind. 'Tis true that all saving faith is the work of the Holy Ghost in us ; but be it always recollected that we ourselves believe, and that the Holy Ghost does not believe for us. What has the Holy Ghost to believe about ?

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It is not written that He is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. No, but *we* are to believe in Him. He leads us to faith, but the faith is our own act and deed; and if there could be supposed to be a faith which was not our own act and deed, it could not possibly be the faith which saves the soul. If I understand aright the faith which saves, it is just this. God has revealed such and such truth. I believe it to be true: I so believe it to be true that I act upon it. God has said that He has laid sin upon Christ. I believe He has done so. He tells me that if I trust Christ, I may be assured *my* sin was laid upon Christ. I trust Christ, that is, I rely upon Him, and the reliance which springs out of belief is the essence of faith.

When a man believes a bank to be safe he will put his money into it if he has need to do so; when a man believes in the honesty of another, the practical issue of it is he takes his word and trusts him. I believe in the truthfulness of God, in the truthfulness of certain narratives given in the four evangelists; I believe that Christ was born at Bethlehem and that He was the Son of God, that He lived and died as the Saviour of men; I believe that His sufferings were expiatory, that He suffered in the stead of men to make recompense to the justice of God for our sins, and believing that I trust my soul in His sacrifice, I rest on it; and that faith saves me.

Now, mark, if I do really rest in Christ I shall do what Christ bids me. *Faith must lead to obedience.* He bids me forsake sin, and I shall do it by His

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help. He bids me follow Him, and I shall do it if I really believe in Him. A doctor says, 'Now, trust me, my man, and I will cure you.' Very good ; I trust him. He sends me medicine : I take the medicine. But suppose I do not take the medicine. Well, then, I never trusted him : my neglect proves that I cannot have done so.

The only trust that saves the soul is that practical trust which obeys Jesus Christ. Faith that does not obey is dead faith—nominal faith. It is the outside of faith, the husk of faith, but it has not the vital corn of faith in it. Sinner, if thou wilt be saved, thou must give thyself up to Jesus Christ to be His servant and to do all that He bids thee. Thou must rely alone upon Him, trust not in fiction, but in reality, not by profession merely, but with thy whole heart ; and thou must continue to lean, rest, lie upon Him, trusting alone in Him. This is what saving faith is.

Now, there are some who say they wish they could get this faith ; they declare that they would do anything to get it. They earnestly long to believe, but somehow they cannot get a grip at faith ; cannot make out quite what it is ; or if they know what it is they are still puzzled, they cannot exercise it.

Albeit faith is the gift of God, it is always the act of man ; while faith is a privilege, it is always a natural duty ; men are bidden to believe in Jesus, and are sinful if they do not believe in Jesus ; where faith does exist it is the gift of God, but where it does not exist it is because men will not believe,

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but shut their eyes to His light. If they would but see it, that light would convince them.

II. LET US THEREFORE CLEAR AWAY SOME DIFFICULTIES WITH REFERENCE TO FAITH.

You want faith, you say. You are not a sceptic ; you accept the word of God. You are not one of those unsound about the deity of Christ, you receive that. Still, you cannot, you say, get at faith in Jesus Christ. Listen, then, to these observations.

First, recollect that it will be your wisdom *not to think so much about faith as about the object of faith*. If I want to believe a thing that is in the newspaper, it is no use my sitting down and reading it over, and saying, 'I should like to believe it, and I will try to believe it.' My proper way is to begin to look into the matter—not into my faith, but into the matter itself, and when I have looked into the matter itself I shall see whether it is reasonable—whether it looks true, and by-and-by, perceiving the truthfulness of it, faith will come to me as a matter of course.

You are to believe in Jesus. Now, forget the believing, and think only of Jesus. If I wanted to love a person it would be useless for me to sit in my chamber and say, 'I shall try to love such a person.' You cannot pump love up out of your heart in that way. But suppose that person is exceedingly beautiful, has a delightful character, and has lived a charming life ; well, I gaze upon that person's face ; I hear the story of his life ; and I feel that what I could not *make* myself do, I do without attempting

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to make myself do it. Love comes of itself. 'If a man should give all the substance of his house for love it would utterly be contemned.'

So it is with faith. Speaking naturally, it comes of itself, through the work of the Spirit of God, from the force of the evidence which is presented to the mind. 'Faith cometh by hearing.' Look, then, more at what is to be believed than at the mere act of believing.

And, next, be solemnly persuaded that what you want is faith, and that you must have. *Do not, therefore, begin confounding faith with something else.* Some of you want an impression; you want a revelation; you want a feeling; you want a sensation. Now, that is not faith; it has nothing to do with faith. It is feeling, it is seeing, but it is not believing. The thing you want is to believe in God, and if you do that you shall be saved; but instead of that you begin to cry, 'Oh! that I felt as Mr. Bunyan felt on such an occasion.' That is not the matter in hand, and you are but turning aside from the point you should aim at when you look to those things instead of faith. All other things will follow faith, but for you who are unsaved, the first, the only, matter is faith in Jesus Christ.

I would exhort you earnestly to pray for help in this matter of believing. Ask the Lord to give you faith, but *I ask you to remember that prayer without faith will not save you*, and that the gospel is not 'He that prays shall be saved,' but 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.' Some

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have unbelievably made a kind of Saviour of their prayers and their tears. It will not do. Away with your prayers if they stand in the room of Christ! It is not what you ask for or feel or do; it is what Christ suffered on the cross that is to save you, and the way you are to get hold of the merit of Christ is by faith; so keep to that. Know what it is you want, and press forward for that.

Now we come to the text more closely still. Faith is the thing we want. We shall get it according to God's order, and God's order is this: 'Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.' *Faith does not come by sacraments.* Nobody ever got faith through a sacrament. It does not say, 'Faith comes by seeing.' Very pretty those processions are, very pretty indeed; and very fine those banners; and very sweet the smoke of that incense. But faith does not come that way. Eyegate is closed, and through Eargate eternal life comes into the soul of man. 'Faith cometh by hearing.'

The religion of Jesus Christ is not a religion of performances. It has its ordinances which belong to believing men, but it never attempts to change the moral nature by mechanical acts. Eating and drinking and washing cannot possibly be the means by which men are reconciled to God and taught to love the Redeemer. There is a moral means wanted—a spiritual means, and the moral and spiritual means are as simple as possible. 'Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.'

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The text suggests two things, then, as to faith's way of approach. If I want to get faith I must hear, but I must mind what I hear; and, I must mind how I hear.

III. LET US REMEMBER THEN THAT FAITH COMES THROUGH THE WORD OF GOD.

Soul, wouldest thou have faith? Then mind what it is thou dost hear, for the hearing must be the word of God. Faith comes by hearing, but not by hearing anything and everything. The hearing is by the word of God; and only as the preaching is according to the word of God will God bless it. God never blessed a falsehood for the creation of a newborn spirit. The truth has vitality in it: only the word of God is the living seed in the soul.

'Well,' say you, 'how am I to hear the word of God, then?' I reply, first, *hear the word of God as you have it in the Bible*. Reading is tantamount to hearing. Be sure, then, if thou wouldest find faith, to study much this priceless, matchless book. Study it all; but if thou wouldest find Christ, dwell most on those four inestimably precious books which tell about Him. Read the story of His life and His death in the four evangelists, and if thou wouldest have a comment upon them read the epistles and study them.

Remember, the point about the word of God is this—that God has spoken to men through this book. Men wrote it, but they wrote as they were inspired and moved by the Holy Ghost. Especially about the Lord Jesus Christ God has spoken to us

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by chosen witnesses. There were first the apostles who have written a considerable part of the New Testament. These men saw Christ. John says, 'The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory.' There were many of them, and they saw the miracles of Christ, so that they were sure He was divine. They saw His holy, guileless life; they saw Him in His death; and what is best of all, and most to be remembered, is that they saw Him risen again, they watched Him during forty days, and they saw Him till a cloud received Him out of their sight.

They were simple-minded men that could not have invented the story; they were unlettered men; and they and hundreds of others so believed it that they died for preaching what they believed. They gained nothing by the statement except scorn and shame. If there is a fact in human history which is verified beyond a doubt, it is the death and resurrection of the Son of God.

Does not that help you to believe? 'Ah!' say you, 'I do believe these facts.' Well, if you do believe them in very deed and truth, what follows from your belief? Why, that you must hate God in your heart, or else you would be saved, because this glorious One of whom they speak came here to save men, and will save all that trust Him. You perceive Him to be a divine person: can you not trust Him? If not, it must be because you have some hatred to Him, and prefer to be damned rather than owe your salvation to the free grace of God.

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Let it not be so! But rather, I pray you, hear His word by attentively reading it, until at last, as you read it, the glory of the inspired truth, which shines in the page, shall flame into your soul, and you shall say, 'I do believe it. How could I have rejected it? It speaks for itself: the Deity is in the word.'

Next to that, however, *hear the preachers of God's word*, for though they are not inspired, yet they can do for you something; we can bear witness to what we have known and felt of the work of Jesus Christ in men's hearts, and this will supplement the witness of the inspired men, and may often help you to faith.

As one has well said, 'If you question a convert you will generally find that he owes his conversion to a text of scripture.' It is God's word, not man's comment on God's word, that generally saves souls. If you long to be saved, go, therefore, to those that keep to the gospel, that keep to the real gospel, and have nothing else to say. That is what you want.

Seek also to hear the preacher that preaches experimentally, one who can tell you that he knows he is a sinner, but that he has believed in Jesus, and is saved, and knows he is saved. For your healing you want to have, not a surgeon who has never seen a case like yours before, but one who knows about it, and if he has gone through the experience himself, then he is the man for you.

If a man has not had anything done for his soul,

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he cannot tell you of anything that has been done. If he has never seen himself to be a sinner, and has never passed from death to life, if he has never known the bitter pangs of soul trouble, and has never looked to the precious Saviour on the cross, and leaped to find himself set free, why, what is the good of him as a preacher? Let him go and bake bread, or break stones on the road. But what has he to do with preaching a gospel of which he knows nothing? Therefore I say again to thee, if thou wouldest get faith, hear that gospel that speaks to thy soul, because he who preaches it speaks from his soul about something that he knows for himself.

And if thou hast thy choice hear one that speaks earnestly, for to hear a cold preacher is the surest way of getting cold thyself. He that trifles with his ministry will make men trifle with their souls. If I speak to any who preach the gospel, I would say that if we do not preach more earnestly people will conclude at once that there is nothing in what we preach; and their blood will be at our door. We have a weighty theme, and we must speak with all our might.

To thee, sinner, I would also say, hear the preacher that speaks pointedly. Do not feel vexed with one who exposes your faults. What do you go to a place of worship for but to have your heart laid bare? A doctor who never makes an examination of his patient, or who, knowing that there is an evil somewhere, is too delicate to allude to it, is a disgrace to his profession. The man who desires

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to heal men will be plain and honest with them, and will not at all attempt to palliate an evil thing.

Take heed what ye hear, for if ye hear the word of God preached in the Spirit of God, then faith comes by such hearing.

IV. LET US BE ASSURED THAT FAITH WILL COME BY HEARING. If we would get faith we must take care how we hear as well as what we hear. The hearing itself is almost as important as the preaching. Faith does not come by every sort of hearing. There have been persons who have heard for many years, but they have heard nothing. It has gone in at one ear, and it has gone out at the other. Faith does not come by such hearing.

Brethren, if we really seek faith, *we ought to hear the gospel aiming at the sense of it first*. It is what a preacher says, not how he says it, that is the vital thing. I am certain, however, that nine-tenths of our hearers are more taken up with how we say it than with what we say. Of course, we all hear a thing the better if it is put well. But pity on the man that cares only about delicacy of diction, and lets his hearers go down to hell! Woe unto him in the great day of account! If, however, the preacher preaches Christ, though he does not preach Him as you would like to hear him, but somewhat uncouthly, yet listen to him whoever he may be, for it is the truth he declares. Do not regard his manner so much as his matter, and pray that it may be blessed.

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You that have not believed, *go to every sermon with the desire to get faith through the sermon.* I believe that our hearers generally get what they come for. If a man fishes he will generally catch fish according to his bait. Some come expecting to get something to find fault with. Well, they are sure to find it. But when a man comes with this design, 'I want to find Jesus; I want to get good for my soul; I want to be saved,' then, if the preacher is what he should be, the man cannot go away disappointed.

If the minister does not preach at all, but only reads part of a chapter, there will be a blessing; if it be only a hymn that is sung, the seeking soul will lay hold of Christ in a hymn, especially if it be such a one as 'Just as I am, without one plea,' or 'Rock of Ages, cleft for me,' or 'Jesus, Lover of my soul.' If you want faith you need not be long wanting it, if you really come anxiously desiring it.

Dear friends, *the kind of hearing that brings faith is attentive hearing.* I have heard of a child that used always to lean forward to catch every word the preacher said; and his mother asked him why. He replied, 'Because, mother, I heard the preacher say that if there was anything in the sermon by which God meant to bless us, the devil would try to draw our attention some other way when it was being said, and I was so afraid that some good thing that would have blessed me might escape me if I was inattentive.' It is joy to preach to a house full of people like that, people that are

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praying as the preacher speaks. 'Oh for a blessing, Lord! Oh that the word might come with power to my soul!'

Then take care to hear retentively. Lay hold upon the Word. Keep it, treasure it. Perhaps, you say, 'I have a bad memory.' Well, the very best thing to do when you have a bad memory is to do as the man did who never could recollect what he owed, so he took care always to pay as he went. If you cannot recollect, go and do at once what you are bidden to do, and then it will not matter about your forgetting it.

'Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only.' If you get the substance, never mind the words. If you have a bad habit, and it is preached against, never mind the sermon; go and break the habit. If you have been neglectful of prayer, never mind the sermon, pray more. And if Jesus Christ is lifted up before you, and you cannot recollect what the preacher says, never mind, look to Jesus. There is Christ upon the cross, and if you look to Him at this moment you shall live for ever. What memory is needed if you look to him *now*? Now, poor sinner, turn thine eye, and thou shalt have heard the gospel in a most retentive manner indeed.

Lastly, *hear the gospel with deep reverence and earnest prayer.* It is no small matter that God should deal with thy soul at all, but that He should condescend to speak to thee on terms of love is a great thing. That His own Son should bleed and die for sinners, is not this a miracle of mercy? With

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such great themes on hand thou oughtest to be greatly reverent during the hearing of the word. Thou shouldest be, indeed, like the earth in the dry weather, that opens wide its mouth, chapped and parched as it is, to suck in every drop of rain that falls. If thou art sitting under the sound of the gospel thus, parched and dry, but opening up thy soul to it, and saying, 'Drop from above, O sacred dew ; come out of heaven, O showers of grace, and fall on me,' it will not be long that you shall so wait.

Your chief business is to look after faith, and my business is to ask you in the name of the eternal God, whether you will believe Him or make Him a liar. One of the two it must be ; He that makes God a liar involves himself in solemn guilt, but he that believes in Him has glorified Him. God accepts the act of believing in Him as one of the noblest acts of man, so great an act that he sees His own Spirit's work in it wherever He perceives it. 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.' Believe in Him now. Our witness is that He does save ; He saves from the guilt of sin ; He saves from the dread and wrath of hell ; He saves from the anger of God ; He saves from despair ; He saves at once ; He saves all that come to Him. Come you to Him ! Amen.

XV

Faith Tried and Triumphant

'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.'—JOB xiii. 15.

THERE are some speeches which could not be made by ordinary men. As soon as you hear them you feel that there is a ring about them by no means common. Certain expressions which have been heard and remembered could have been uttered only by great warriors, or by men who have navigated the vast ocean. Certain other still nobler expressions, because spiritual ones, could have been uttered only by those who have had to fight with spiritual foes, or have done business on the great waters of soul trouble. When you hear the expression, 'If there are as many devils at Worms as there are tiles on the housetops, I will go there in God's name,' you are quite certain the speaker is Martin Luther. No other than he could have said it. And just as certainly, I think, I should have felt, if I had read the text to-night for the first time, that it was Job who said it, and nobody else.

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Job was a master sufferer. No man went deeper in grief than he: his children all dead, his wealth all swept away, his whole body covered with sore boils and blanes, and the friends who pretended to comfort him only accusing him of being a hypocrite; while his own wife bids him 'curse God and die.' He was brought lower than any; and, therefore, being a man of faith, having overcome and triumphed by faith, it was like him to utter such a noble speech as that which our text brings before us. 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him,' is not the utterance of any ordinary commonplace believer. It is a sort of word which, as we are quite sure, could only come from a triumphant Job—triumphant by victorious faith. However, I trust there are some here who could use this expression now that another has fitted it for their lips, and I hope that all of us who have any faith at all may have that faith so increased that yet, without boasting, we may be able still more to say, 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.'

I. In speaking upon this text I would note, first, THAT FAITH IS THE HABITUAL GRACE OF THE CHRISTIAN. To trust in God is his usual mode of life. He does not sometimes trust and sometimes cease to trust; but 'the just shall *live* by faith.' Faith is not a grace of luxury but a grace of necessity. We *must* have it, and if we had it not we should not be the people of God at all. The common habit of the Christian then is a habit of trusting. The Christian's walk is faith, and his life is faith.

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Faith is to the Christian all the spiritual senses, not one, but all. The natural man has his eyes, but by faith we see Him who is invisible. The natural man has his hand and his feeling. We live not by feeling, but faith is our hand by which we take fast hold upon eternal realities. The natural man has his ear, and it is delighted with sweet sounds, or through it the language of friendship enters his heart. Our faith is our ear through which we hear the voice of God, and sometimes even catch stray notes from the harps of the angels. The natural man hath the nostril with which he becomes aware of sweet perfumes; it is to our faith that the name of Jesus is as ointment poured forth. If we receive Christ all the inlets by which we receive Christ and His grace are made of the agate of faith. Gates of carbuncle, windows of agate, are all faith. The light of God and the love of God come into our consciousness by our faith.

Faith, too, is with the Christian his first and his last. Faith looking to Christ is the very beginning of spiritual life. We began to live at the cross-foot when we looked up and saw the flowing of those fountains of forgiveness, the five wounds of Christ. And as faith was the first, so it will be the last. We expect to die looking for our Lord's appearing, and resting still upon His finished work. And all between the alpha and the omega—all the other letters, we read them all by faith. There is no period of our life in which it is safe for us to live by feeling, not even when our enjoyments run

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highest. On the mount, where Christ is transfigured, and where in the midst of the glory we shall fall asleep in amazement, we cannot live by sense. Even there we can only enjoy the glory as faith shall continue to be in exercise. We must, all the way through, from the first to the last, look out of ourselves, and look above the things which are seen, to grasp the things which are not seen, to be touched with the eternal hand, and realize that which does not seem real to sense. This is the life of the Christian from the first to the last.

And I would add, as it is his first and last, so *faith is the Christian's highest and his lowest*. If ever we get upon the mountain summit and bask our foreheads in the sunlight of fellowship with God, we stand there only by faith. It is because our faith is strong and in active exercise that we realize the things not seen as yet, and behold the God whom mortal eyes cannot gaze upon. Our very noblest, happiest, and most heavenly frames are those which are the results of faith. And so in our lowest. We can only live there by faith. Have you never lain shattered and broken, crushed and destroyed, expecting something yet more terrible ; and have you not felt that now in your faintness you fell back into the Saviour's arms ; that now in your brokenness you dropped into His hand ; that now in your abject nothingness He must be all in all to you, or else there will be an utter end to you ? Oh ! the faith that is as wings to us when we fly, becomes a lifebuoy to us when we sink. The faith

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which bears us up to the gates of heaven also uplifts us from the very gates of hell. 'Tis our first and our last; 'tis our highest and our lowest. It is all the senses of our spiritual nature. We must have it and always have it. We *must* trust in the Lord.

The matters about which the true Christian is to trust are very many, but they are chiefly these.

We trust for the pardon of our sins to our God in Christ Jesus. The only hope that any Christian has for the forgiveness of his iniquity lies in the sacrifice presented on Calvary by the Lamb of God whom God has given for the sins of the world. If any shall ask us whether we trust our sins are forgiven because of our repentance, or because of a long life of active Christian service, we reply we are thankful if God has given us these things, but our sole reliance is in our dear Lord and Master once fastened to the cross, but now sitting in power in the highest heavens. Our trust for the pardon of sin in every degree and every respect lies in Christ the Son of God and there only. In this matter we can use the language of Job and say, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him,' for the fact is, the more fully we are slain the more truly we do trust. When we see ourselves to be utterly dead, slain by the two-edged sword of the Lord, and all hope of our own self-salvation to be a corpse, then more easy than before it is to come and cast ourselves upon the Christ of God, and rest there for all our salvation from the guilt of sin.

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But in God *we trust also for the purification of our spirits* from all the indwelling power of sin. Some Christians do not appear to make this a matter of faith, and therein they do not succeed. You can no more conquer sin in yourself—really conquer it, by your own strength, than you can remove the guilt of it by your own merits. The same Christ who is made unto us ‘justification’ and ‘redemption,’ is also made unto us ‘sanctification,’ and we must never forget that while we wash our robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb as to pardon, we also overcome our sins through the blood of the Lamb. The same Saviour who takes away the guilt takes away the power, the defiling power, of sin. Well has Toplady put it:—

‘Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,—
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.’

Now, the true Christian can say that he trusts in God for his effectual purification and his final perfection. He does not hope to drive out one of these Canaanites by his own arm. He does not think that he shall slay one of his corruptions in his own strength. But his eyes are unto the hills whence cometh his help, and he believes that the eternal Spirit will, like refining fire, go through and through his soul till everything in him shall be burnt up except that which is of God, that which will endure the fire and be well-pleasing in Jehovah’s sight.

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The matters upon which we rely upon God, then, are, as far as I have yet gone, the finished work of Jesus Christ, and the power that there is in Christ and in the blessed Spirit to sanctify us, spirit, soul, and body.

But our trust is in God in another sense, namely, first, *we trust Him believing that He always must be just*. It does not occur to us that God could be unjust. In the days of our flesh we used to think, if we suffered some extreme pain, or if we passed suddenly from wealth to poverty, that God had dealt very hardly with us; but now we feel that His strokes are fewer than our crimes and lighter than our guilt; and it does not occur to us in any way to impeach the justice of God, let Him do what He will. We feel that if He not only should slay us, but if He should cast us into hell for ever, as we stand in ourselves and on our own footing, we could not complain against Him. This is our confidence, that whatever our position is, God has dealt justly with us, and He never will deal unjustly with us, and we shall never have to say of any one transaction that we have with Him, 'This is not according to the rule of right.'

But, we go a great deal further. Having believed in Christ Jesus, and having become His children, *we trust, believing that God will never do anything to us but that which is full of love*. We are assured that His eternal love does not only come forth now and then, that it does not only permeate and infuse itself into a few of His actions;

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but that all His conduct towards His children is actuated by the motive power of love. He is always love towards those who put their trust in Him. We are sure that He never gives us a pain more than is needful, that He never lets us suffer a loss more than is necessary. 'Though for a season, if need be, we are in heaviness through manifold temptations,' we know and are convinced that there *is* a need be for it. We trust His justice and we trust His goodness.

And, more, *we trust His wisdom mingled with all this.* He has said that 'all things work together for good to them that love God,' and we believe it; we have had some bitters in our cup, but we still believe it; we expect to have a great many more, but we are assured that through the help of God's Spirit we shall still believe this,—that come what may, expected or unexpected, in the way of grief and sorrow, still the ultimate good shall come out of the whole. God's purpose of love shall not be thwarted, but rather shall be answered by every circumstance of our history. Therefore do we trust in God that He is just and cannot do us an unrighteous action; that He is loving and cannot do an untender thing to us; that He is wise and loving and just, and will make all things work together for good.

In fine, *we trust Him as a child trusts its parent,* that is, for everything. There are many things about Him that we cannot understand, as there were about our parents in our childhood, but we

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trust Him and know that there is none like Him. 'There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun.' We trust Him in all that He doeth. We cannot understand Him, for His way is in the sea and His footsteps are not known; but we are sure that they are footsteps of holiness, and ways of righteousness. We trust Him for all the past and all the present, aye, and for all the future, too; that future which sometimes looms before us in the mist and half alarms us till we are ready to shrink back from it. We gather up the skirts of our robe again, and though we fear as we enter into the cloud, yet are we comforted with the full conviction that He who has done so well in the past, will be with us even to life's close.

Thus I have tried to show you that the whole tenor of the Christian man's life is trust,—that, as in the text, 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.'

II. Now the second point shall be that those of us who have learned to trust in God expect that OUR FAITH SHALL BE TRIED. The text has the supposition that it shall be tried extremely. He does not say, 'Though I *die*'; that would be a great trial. Death is not a pleasant thing, it is no child's play to the strongest believer. Job does not say, 'Though I die,' but, 'Though He *slay* me.' That is more. He does not say, 'Though He *permit* me to be slain,' but, 'Though *He* slay me; though He should seem to be so much my enemy as to turn round and kill me, though I may

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not believe His action, I will believe Himself; I will believe His infallible word. Even though He slay me.' It is not, 'Though He make me hunger, or, though He put me in prison, though He suffer me to be mocked at, though He suffer me to be banished from all my friends and to live a solitary and wretched life.' No, it is more than that: 'Though He *slay* me.' And, mark, it is not, 'Though He slay my children; though He take away my wife; though He remove all my dear kindred.' It is more than that. 'Though He slay *me*; though it come right home to my own self.'

Ah! Job knew what he meant, for all other things had been done except the slaying of him. His children were dead, and the house in which they had met was a ruin. All he had was gone, health had gone, and he could not rest by reason of the disease which was all over him, most painful and most acute. He had nothing left on earth that was worth having. He was even friendless; and he was worse than wifeless, for his wife had turned against him. Yet, he says, there is but one thing more that can be done, and God has kept Satan back from that. He said, 'Only thou shalt not take his life.' But if the Lord choose to let loose the dog without even the link of a chain upon him,—though He suffer me now to lose my life itself,—

'Though He slay me, I will trust,
Praise Him even from the dust,—
Prove, and sing it as I prove,
His eternal gracious love.'

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Now, the text evidently implies that *faith will be tried, and tried severely*. Let us think a moment of it. Has it not been always the case that if any man has had a faith beyond his fellow men it has met with trial. If you go a step beyond the ordinary rank and file you will be shot at for that very reason. Columbus believes that there is another part of the world undiscovered; what ridicule is heaped upon him. Galileo says the world moves; he must be put into the inquisition; the poor old man must be forced to deny what he was quite sure was the truth. It was dangerous in those days to know too much and to believe a little more than other people. And in spiritual things it is just the same. The world is against the true faith. The faith of God's elect is not a flower that men delight to smell at. It is a thing which, wherever they see it, they count as a speckled bird, and they are sure to be against it. If thou hast faith in God remember that this is not the world of faith, but the world of unbelief, and the darkness that is in the world will try to quench thy light.

But remember that true *faith scorns trial and outlives it*. It is not worth having if it does not. If I believe in the friendship of my friend, and it cannot bear a little trial, it is not real friendship. Perhaps, in your youth, as with most of us, there was some one exceeding dear to you. In your boyish or girlish days you would walk with some companion, and you swore inseparable friendship.

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Ah, how many of those friendships did you make, and they were broken! Since then, perhaps, we have thought that someone with whom we took sweet counsel never by any possibility could betray us; but there came a test of our friendship. We were not worth so much as once we were, or we were not so much esteemed as we used to be, or there happened to be a misunderstanding; and in a little tiff the friendship was marred. But that faith which a man has in his fellow men that is worth having will not yield so easily. No, saith the man, 'If you say anything to me against my friend I do not believe you, I think there is some other way of reading it. If you do speak the truth you do not know all about it; there is something else that would change the complexion of it. And even if you were to convict him of a fault I would still love him, for there are many virtues in him, and if he did this thing he must have made a mistake. I will defend him.'

Now, transfer this from common life to faith in God. If a man says, 'I trust in God,' and it is all smooth sailing, and his children are about him and he has plenty upon the table, his body is in health, and he has all that heart could wish—well, we will see what sort of faith that is. It is not proved yet; but will the man believe his God when God begins to take away all he loves? Will he believe Him when the wife pines away with a long and painful sickness? Will he believe Him when child after child is taken to the tomb? Will he believe Him

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when he sees his property taken away before his eyes? Will he believe his God when he himself can scarcely move hand or foot upon the bed of sickness? Will he still be able to bless the name of the Lord when he is stripped of everything? If he can, this is faith worth having, but if he cannot then it is not the faith that is worthy of God, and it is well it does give way, for it may drive the man then to seek the true faith which would bear the tests.

You see, then, brethren, if we have faith we must expect to have it tried, by reason of faith being an unusual thing in the world, and because if it would not bear trial it would not be worth having. History tells us that the best servants of God have had their trials, and why should we expect to escape. We turn over the historical pages of this Book, which are so full of instruction to us, and we find that all the Lord's children have had to do battle for the preservation of their faith. There is no smooth road to heaven. Steam rollers can be used for the earth, for our common roads, but you shall find the flint stones on the road to glory. They have never been rolled smooth yet, and they never will be.

'The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown.'

Faith must and shall be tried as surely as it is the faith of God's people; and if the best of saints have been obliged to say that through much

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tribulation they have inherited the Kingdom, we must not expect that God will change His rule with us. I would not, however, encourage one thing which I have sometimes noticed, namely, the fear which comes into some Christians that they are not God's people because they have not been much tried. All the saints meet with trial. I know a dear friend who is suffering just now, who says that he was occasionally afflicted with a fear that he could not be a child of God because he was so long without a sickness or without a trial. Ah, you will have that case met quite soon enough. Do not run after trouble, remember troubles of our own seeking would not be genuine strokes of the rod. You may leave that in God's hand. Do not fret yourself there. Only, when the trials do come to you let this console you, that

‘Bastards may escape the rod,
Plunged in sensual vain delight,
But the true-born child of God
Must not,—would not, if he might.’

In our peace of soul, if God has given it to us by lot and by inheritance, some thorns and thistles must and will spring up in this present world.

Moreover, dear brethren, *the trial is greatly for our good and greatly for God's glory*. Our faith could never grow, neither could we be sure of it, if it had not been tested. They do not send steam vessels out to sea at once. Often you see on the Clyde vessels being tried—tried on the Gairloch—before they go out to sea. And God

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tries us here before we take the great ocean of judgment—ere we come to the time of death. We have our trials here and we grow by our trials. Among the best mercies we have ever received are those mercies that have come to us dressed in the sombre garb of mourning, which have carried treasures in both their hands. God be thanked for the fire! God be thanked for the refiner's furnace and the crucible! They have been among the best things we have inherited from His mercy.

Thus I have brought out two ideas of the text. The Christian lives by faith, and he expects the faith to be tried.

III. But now the next point is the main point of the text,—that A TRUE FAITH, PUT ON TRIAL, WILL CERTAINLY BEAR IT. 'Though He slay me.' It is an extreme expression. 'Though He do His worst, though He give the last and uttermost stroke that can be taken, yet will I not disbelieve Him. Though He slay me.'

Faith will be justified to the uttermost. It is very easy to believe the creature too much. It is a common fault. It is impossible to trust the Creator too much. To trust Him too little is one of the most usual of sins. Faith in the creature is hardly ever warranted. Faith in the Creator can be warranted, push it as far as ever you like. You know that there is a point where faith in the creature must stop. Our dearest friends can go with us only to the Jordan's brink, and then they can help us no longer. But though we go through

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the valley of the shadow of death God is with us, and we need fear no evil. Though it comes actually to the slaying and to the death, still we may trust in Him, for He cannot—He will not—fail us.

Why is it that the believer is warranted in trusting in God to the very last extremity? The answer is, because He is always the same God. If He is worth trusting one day He is worth trusting another. He cannot change. His character is such that if it is infinitely worthy of my confidence to-day, it will be just the same in the rough weather that may come to-morrow. Could He change, then my faith in Him ought to change; but if He be ever the same true, faithful, loving and tender God, ruling all things by His power, there can be no reason why my faith should make a change. I ought to trust Him, Who at all times is the same.

I ought to trust Him also to the last, because *outward providences prove nothing to us about God*. We cannot read outward events correctly; they are written in hieroglyphics. The book of God is readable; it is written in human language; but the works of God are often unreadable.

‘Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain.
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.’

We begin spelling God’s works and making mischief out of them, because we do not know the letters or understand the alphabet, and cannot

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readily know what He means. If the Lord saith He loves us, do we believe it though he smites us? Do we believe that—

‘Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face?’

Be wise, then, and believe in the God thou canst not see, and not in the outward providence which thou canst see; for if thou couldest see that outward providence aright as God sees it, thou wouldest see it to be as full of love as assuredly God’s heart is to thee, if thou art a believer in Him. Therefore, since the outward is no sign to us, let us, when it gathers all the black it can, still believe in Him. When it shall seem most severe, and deep calleth unto deep at the noise of God’s waterspouts, let us still hope in Him, for He is the health of our countenance and our God.

Moreover, brethren, there is another cause why we should always trust in Him. To whom else can we go? *We are shut up to this.* When it comes to slaying, to cutting, to striking, and to killing work, what can the soul do but fall into the Creator’s arms? When it comes to dying, what words shall fit these lips so well as those, ‘Father, into Thy hand I commit my spirit.’ The course of the Christian’s life is such that he feels it more necessary to trust every day he lives. He does not get off the line of faith, he gets more into the middle of it, as he feels his weakness more, and at the last, when his weakness will be more apparent,

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he will want faith more than ever, and he will have it, too. He shall be able to say, 'My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.' Ah! I say again, to whom should we go in trouble but unto God? All other sources are then dried up. The world mocks us, it seems to be a howling wilderness. 'Tis only from heaven the manna can come; only from the rock Christ Jesus the living water can gush forth.

And there is one other word I will say before I leave this point; we may depend upon it *God will always justify our faith* if we do trust Him. There was never one who in the long run had to say, 'I was a fool to trust in God.' Many have said to us, in time of trouble, 'He trusted in God that He would deliver Him; let Him deliver Him,' and they have hissed between their teeth that hideous taunt, 'Where is now their God?' But God has not left the righteous to be ashamed and to be offended for ever. They have had perhaps a blush on the cheek for a moment, for the flesh is weak, but they have not been confounded for long. Faith has come to the rescue, and God has fulfilled their faith. Many a man has trusted in himself and been deceived; many have trusted in their wealth and been disappointed; thousands have relied on friends, and have been betrayed; but blessed is the man, O Lord of hosts, who stayeth himself on Thee. You can go beyond your friend's line and measure; you may readily expect too much of him; you can try the temper of the dearest one you have on earth,

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and at last feel that you have tried it too much ; but you can never go beyond the line of God. Your sin will rather be in limiting the Holy One of Israel. You will never open your mouth too wide for Him ; you will never ask too much at his hands ; you will never expect too much ; you will never believe too much. Has He not Himself said, 'I am the Lord Thy God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.' The wider you open it the better ; the larger your expectations the better, for, according to thy faith so shall it be done unto you.

Now I must repeat the grand word again, 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.' This means that *we surrender all to God*, even as Job did. You see the good man makes no choice of sufferings. We are apt to say, when any trial comes to us, 'I could trust God in everything but this.' Can you not trust Him in this also? See what a sweet thought Job has, 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.' That is, whatever He chooses to do is right. Yes, but you say, 'He has touched my bone and my flesh.' So He had Job's. 'But He has taken away the dear ones that dwelt in my heart.' So He had with Job. 'Ah! but I had not a Christian friend to console me. If I had but somebody to speak a kind word, then I think I could trust.' Job had no comforters but those who have passed into a proverb as, 'Job's comforters,' those whose words but increased his woe. Oh! make no choice of griefs. If we had a choice of

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our troubles of course we would not choose troubles at all; or if we did, we should never be able to choose one that would suit us. We should want to alter our first choice like the man who was being flogged. He said, 'Hit me higher,' and then when he was struck where he desired he wanted to be hit lower down. There is really no place to be flogged upon that will really suit a man, and there is no trouble, if it be a trouble, that we should really like. We must get away from the idea of choice, and learn to say, 'Lord, strike me anywhere. Bastinado the foot, or strike the head; from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot I would surrender all to Thee, and though Thou slayest me, yet will I trust in Thee.' That is the spirit of the text.

Now, in closing, I would observe that if we say the text, *it will take a good deal of saying*, and if it is true, it will want the power of God Himself to make it true. You can stand up to-night and say, 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.' But how would it be if He took you at your word? Did you ever question yourself thus, Christian brethren? You have said, 'Well, I hope I have a faith that will bear me safely into the presence of God.' Did you ever put yourself in the posture of a dying man, and think whether you could look death in the face? You have said, 'I hope when I am weighed in the balances I shall not be found wanting.' Did you ever get in the scales and try? Have you made a self-examination, an earnest proving, testing,

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trying of yourself? They do not send out a gun from the foundry without putting it into the proof-house to see whether it will bear the discharge of the powder. Have you ever put yourself into the proof-house?

But beware, above all things, of religious boasting. Recollect that God does not care for our words; it is the heart, it is the reality and truth of what we say, not the verbiage, that commends us to Him. Many a man says very boldly, 'Though God should slay me, I will trust Him,' and yet when God stops him a week's work he does not trust Him. If he had a child sick his faith would begin to waver. A little puff of wind will alter some people's faith, for heaviest the heart is in the heavy air. Oh! for a faith that can stand the test! Seek such faith, look to the strong for strength in this matter, and cry loudly unto Him who is the author and the finisher of faith that He would strengthen it in you. Say, 'Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief, and bring me to this, that I can look anything in the face.' And say: 'Let all the floods of earth, and all the outflowings from hell, and even the drenching trials that come from heaven, come upon me, yet will I stay myself on the Lord, for He will not fail me, neither will He leave me. His mercy cannot depart from His chosen. He will keep to the end those that have rested in Him.'